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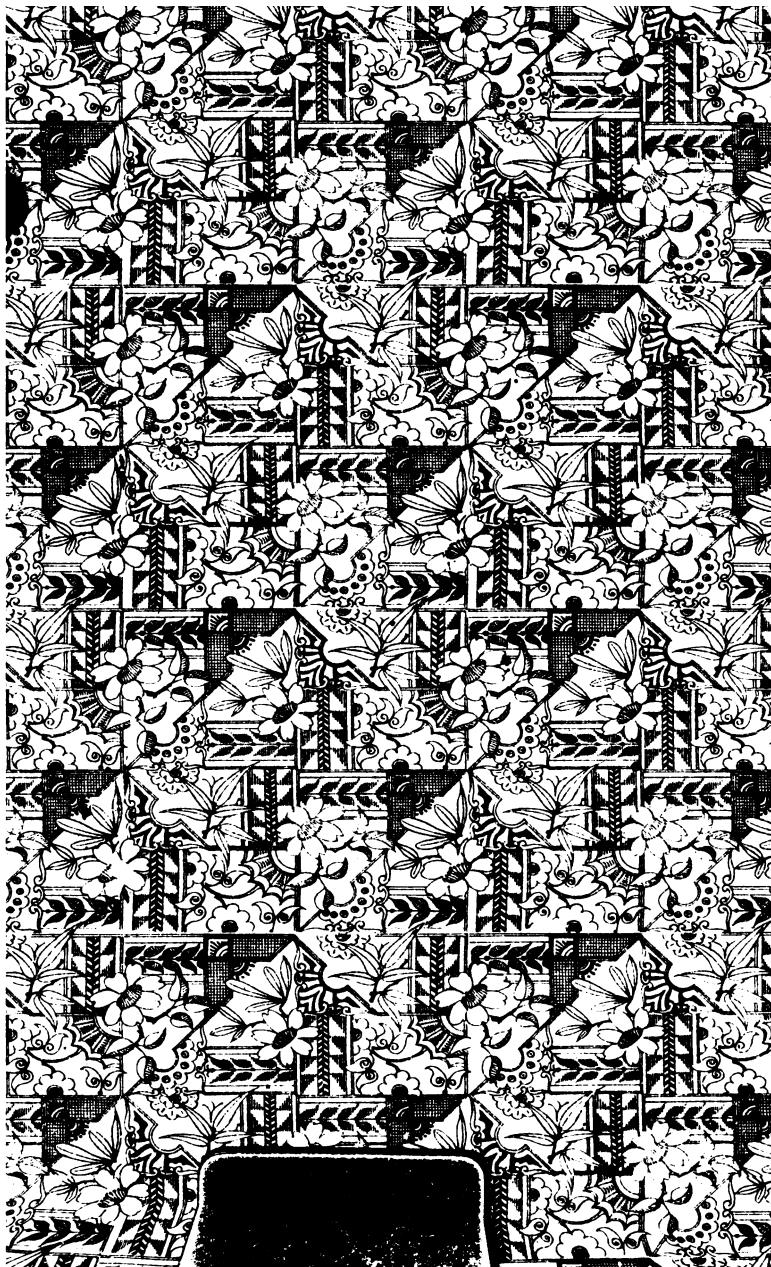
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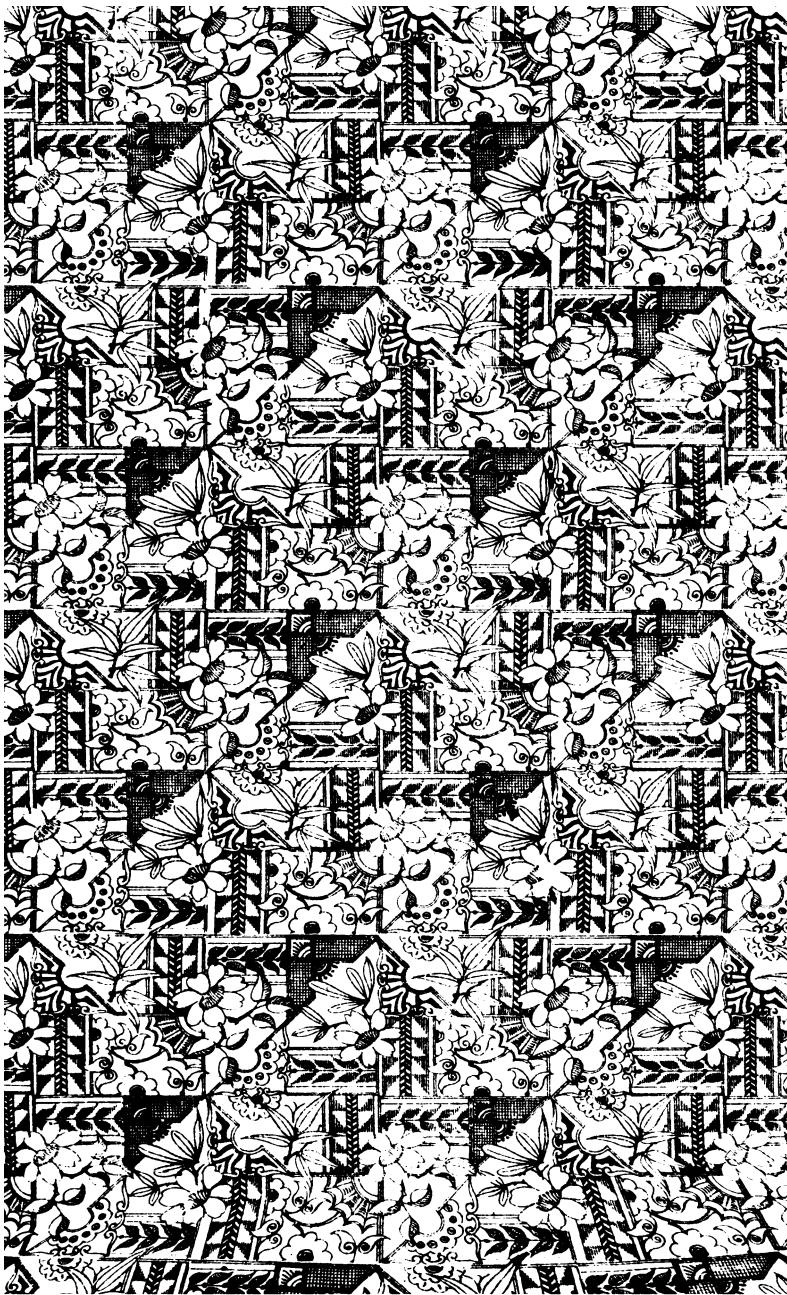
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STEYNEVILLE.













STEYNEVILLE;

OR,

FATED FORTUNES.

Being the Memoirs of an Unextraordinary Man.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

HÉLÈNE E. A. GINGOLD.

“ ‘Tis more by fortune than by merit.”

SHAKESPEARE.

“ But who can turn the stream of destiny ?”

SPENSER.

VOL. I.

LONDON :

REMINGTON & CO., PUBLISHERS,
HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

1885.

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TO MY KINSMAN,
THE CHEVALIER S. DE SULZER, K.F.J., ETC., ETC.,
THESE VOLUMES ARE INSCRIBED,
AS A HUMBLE TOKEN
OF THE AFFECTION, ESTEEM AND ADMIRATION,
IN WHICH HE AND HIS GENIUS ARE HELD
BY
THE AUTHOR.

A P O L O G U E.

ONCE there lived a man who, after many endeavours, built a cockleshell of a boat—a boat so puny and weak, that he feared to venture it on the waves lest it would sink.

“ Why, didn’t you build something more substantial ? ” inquired a friend.

“ Because I hadn’t sufficient material, ” responded the craftsman, despondingly. “ Would you advise me to launch the frail thing ? ”

“ Now she’s built she may as well tempt fate. Believe me, she stands more than a fair chance to *go under*. ”

Thus speaking, the comforter walked away.

Our craftsman, however, still sat by the sea shore day after day, watching with longing eyes the launching of other men's vessels, and saw these sail away across the ocean, and after a time return to their owners laden with grain. Despair at last prompted : " Small ships sail as well as big ones, nay, even ride over those waves which buffet the big ones. Besides, she's no use in harbour." Thus determined, he filled his vessel with a small quantity of every kind of spice, and anxiously launched his venture—vowing it would be his last if the waves swallowed it up. Poor devil ! his heart and soul were at work when he built the ship, and though he saw her faults when she was completed, the thought of seeing that which he loved wrecked and spoiled, troubled him.

No sooner was she fairly on the waters when the cold wind of Censure howled, " I am coming," and the heavy breaker Ridicule caught up the refrain, and surged, " So am

I.” “Take care,” warned the hidden rocks of Cape Critical, “we’ll perforate you.” “O, my poor little boat,” groaned the man, and he turned his head aside that he should not see the collapse of his work.

The vessel lost to sight, his friend again appeared, and demanded, “What troubles you? Where’s the boat?”

“Gone! Do you think she will ever come back to me?”

“How on earth can I tell?” said the other, kindly; “why should I care—”

“Dear friend,” quoth the craftsman, hesitatingly, “didn’t you advise me? I but vaguely recollect the conversation—”

“O, don’t incriminate *me*! What if she does go down? Isn’t that a proof of her unseaworthiness? You might have put her under a glass case—”

“That will do—I understand!” interrupted the shipbuilder more cheerfully; “everything is worth as much as it gets!”

“Besides,” quoth the friend, confidentially,

as they adjourned to a neighbouring tavern,
“isn’t there plenty of timber about where-
with you might build another and a stronger
vessel ?”

“Yes, if I take some of my neighbour’s
materials,” observed the craftsman, honestly
indignant.

“Well ; it’s done every day,” remarked his
friend.

“True !” And our craftsman was resigned.

CHAPTER I.

I SHALL commence my tale, or history, from the time when I first began to take notice and think of the things which I saw about me. At five years of age I could pronounce my name, "Harold Steyneville," distinctly, and knew that only one of my parents was alive—my father. How well I remember him! He was of medium height, well proportioned, with a countenance that must have been very handsome once, for his features were fine still, although he was past fifty. His was a face pervaded by an ineffable melancholy; he very rarely smiled, and when I had attained the age of eight years, I saw that when he looked into my eyes, as I sat on his knee, he appeared to become even more sorrowful and melancholy than before. I was his only

child, whom he fondly loved, whom he taught, caressed, and played with, although he but seldom laughed when he gamed with me. He held me in his arms when I was tired, and looked on me with his dark, inscrutable eyes, seeming to search for something he could not find. He never mentioned my mother's name to me ; but when we were out walking, and I saw children of my own age trotting by the side of women, who looked tenderly on their little ones, I would ask, " Father, dear, did *I* never have a mother ? "

After a time I could see, child as I was, that the question was positively painful to him, and so I refrained from asking it any more, although I pondered over the matter, and wondered why I did not have that which other children did.

We lived in a great, bleak house ; so bleak, indeed, that in summer most of the rooms were chill enough to have fires in them. It stood in a good-sized track of land, whereon grew high trees which never seemed to possess enough foliage to cover them up comfortably like the others. Ours was a weird and wild garden, long run to *seed*, where the only green that flourished

on the soil to greet the sight was weed; where the buds never blossomed into full-blown flowers, but died away in their infancy; where the grass never grew high and green, but withered away as it sprung from the earth as if the place were affected by blight, or beneath a curse. A piece of water that had once been an ornamental lake was in the midst of this wilderness, but it was now stagnant, and tall ugly weeds threw ghostly shadows on its surface.

We were not rich, but the Steynevilles were a noble race, and dated far back to a most remote region of antiquity. The mansion in which we lived had been first occupied by Henri de Steyneville two hundred years ago, and he dubbed it "Steyneville," and so it was called ever since; very justly too, for it was stoney by nature as well as by name.* Our staff of servants consisted of two—man and wife—who had both been in my father's employ for the space of fifteen years, and they were both very much attached to us. Indeed, Batty and Birch were models of industry and goodness. I verily believe the

* Steyne being a corruption of *stein*, the German for stone. The Steynevilles were somewhat of a cosmo-political race.

latter would have jumped into the fire had my father bidden him to perform such an act. But his devotion was never taxed quite so far. As for Batty, her affection and admiration for me was so extravagant that even now I blush to think of it. Nothing was too good for Master Harold--nothing too fine. "To be sure," the honest soul would say, "the blessed young master when he grows up will make the lonely old place gay again, and we shall have grand doings here, too. Ah," she generally wound up by adding, shaking her head all the while retrospectively, "I mind the time when Steyneville Hall was Liberty Hall, and I don't know what all, but that'll all come back again when the sweet young master brings home the lovely princess which Heaven is a-going to send a-purpose to be his wedded wife." I listened to the above harangue quite confident of its truth, applauding Batty on her powers of prognostication.

When I attained the years of discretion, I would quietly laugh at her speeches concerning the glory I would possess when a man, without troubling myself to work for it like other men.

CHAPTER II.

I HAVE mentioned before that my father was my only instructor, but he was so clever, and I so apt and greedy for learning, that at the age of nine I already knew as much as lads of twice my years. Not only was I advanced in the study of three or four sciences, but I spoke French and German fluently; rode well, fenced better, and wrote execrable Latin verses. Although this may appear to be very precocious in a lad of my age, the fact is not very wonderful when one considers that almost the whole time of a clever man was spent in instructing a naturally quick child. But for all my learning I must say I never lost a child's ways, and loved a romp, a scramble, or a climb as much as anyone, particularly when accom-

panied by a companion some few years older both in mischief as in body. This was Sydney Noël, Viscount Stapleton, a curly-pated, oval-faced youth, who looked so thoughtful and dreamy that none would ever have guessed that it was he who sucked the eggs at Farmer Briggs's which the hen was hatching, and put them back again; that it was he who robbed the orchards; that it was he who incited a mob of boys to hoot and execrate his tutor, who, so the reprobate said, was a Jacobite priest in disguise, who harboured designs of de-throning her most gracious Majesty Queen Anne in favour of the young Pretender; that it was he who was at the bottom of every prank performed in the quarter where we lived. None ever thought that the demure, grave-eyed boy was the audacious and fun-loving lad he was. He had a soft, sweet voice, which he certainly knew how to turn to good account for his own purposes, and which served him excellent stead.

His father would come over sometimes and sit with us of an evening, bringing Sydney

with him. My lord was not a well-read man, but he appreciated, or seemed to, those who were. One night as he entered I happened to be reading “Hamlet” aloud to my father. Of course, I immediately closed the book and rose to greet Sydney.

“Pray don’t let me disturb you,” quoth my lord, good-naturedly. “Open your book and continue from the place where you left off; but first tell me, what is it called?”

His son took the book from the table, and ere I could open my mouth to answer, replied, with imperturbable serenity—

“Shakespeare, by Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.”

“A book by a prince!” cried the astonished gentleman. “I’ll get that, by Jove, only to see what it’s like. Sydney, remind me—a book by a prince, by all that’s wonderful! Who ever heard of such a thing?”

I do not know how my father kept his countenance, for I rushed from the room, with my handkerchief crammed into my mouth, to prevent an unseemly explosion of mirth, and almost put an end to my existence

by suffocation in consequence. When I returned I found them engaged in a conversation about other matters; but not till both our visitors had gone did I know how much I had hurt the feelings of my father by my behaviour.

“Harold,” he said, gravely, “the principal part of a gentleman’s education is to behave as a gentleman. Don’t think, my boy, that by knowing a few sciences, by being able to ride and fence well, that any-one can lay claim to the title of a gentleman; nay, it is a fallacy, a delusion that I would not have my son fall into. A true gentleman must not only possess a heart that is capable of being moved to the cry of the distressed, but he must not mock or jeer at those who do not possess the same advantages of education as himself—”

“But,” interrupted I, very pleadingly, “his own son, you know—”

“His own son’s lack of respect and good behaviour cannot, and does not, excuse mine. Which of the two, do you think, betrayed the most ignorance this evening—the one who openly avows that he knows nothing of

literature, and blunders; or the one who professes to be a gentleman, and— ”

I dreaded the words that I knew were coming, for the very worst reproach my father could bestow on me was, “ Harold, this is not like a gentleman,” so I made this remarkable excuse—

“ Sir, pardon me this time. If ever I so offend again, please do think I am yet so young, and that I shall learn as I grow older. Indeed, I will try my best to please you.”

“ My dear boy,” he said, affectionately, “ I know you will. You are the only one now—I have left—to love me,” he added in a lower voice, quite brokenly.

I was seriously alarmed; never having seen him give way before to an emotion, of this nature. Heaven alone knows what strange thoughts rushed into my mind, but foremost of them all was my mother, a name which he had never mentioned to me. I had never thought of this before, and even now I do not know what impelled me to say—

“ Father, are you thinking of the mother

I never knew? O, if I only could, how willingly —”

He turned round with a look that I shall never forget, so full of fearful anguish and sorrow, that I could only stare with all my eyes, and with a wildly beating heart, upon his face. After a pause, he said, in a voice that rung quite strangely in my ears —

“Leave me, Harold; I am not well. I am” — and with a stifled groan he fell senseless to the ground.

CHAPTER III.

ALTHOUGH my father had perfectly recovered his health a day or two after the foregoing, the scene made a very painful impression on me. As I turned the matter over and over in my mind, I came to the conclusion that my mother was the cause of it. "But," reasoned I within myself, "Batty said she died in my infancy, and that is twelve years ago," and I could make nothing more of it than my father had loved my mother very, very much, and could not forget her, though I wondered still why her very name should so agitate him.

One morning, when I came down late to breakfast, I noticed my father already

dressed in his walking habit, and eating his morning meal very hastily.

I refrained from asking any questions, but my glance was inquisitive enough, for he replied to my look —

“Yes, Harold, I am going abroad, and will not return before night.”

“Indeed!” I returned, considerably astonished by the intelligence. “May I ask where you’re going?”

“That,” answered my father, rather sadly, “you will know in good time, but not now. I am going to bring something home with me this evening, which I think will surprise you.”

“Pleasantly?” I hazarded.

“I hope so—but good-bye, I must be off; don’t be up to any mischief with Stapleton. God bless you, dear boy.” And with a hurried embrace he was gone.

After breakfast I descended to the lower regions, with the end in view of pumping Batty, whom I found bustling about with a vast amount of linen in her arms.

“Good-morning, Batty,” said I. “Do you know where my father has gone?”

“Not I, my blessed Master Harry,” returned Batty, who was a very bad hand at deception.

“Come, do tell me,” I continued, as coaxingly as I could. “I’m certain you know all about it, and—what are you going to do with those sheets and things?”

“Why, put on your bed and master’s,” returns Batty, promptly.

“Now, don’t tell me that; it was only yesterday you put fresh sheets and pillow-cases on both beds. I believe,” I added, cogitating, and more to myself, “that we’re going to have visitors.”

“Lord, Master Harry, visitors!” cried Batty, with a little hysterical laugh, “what visitors? Who could ha’ put that stuff into your head?”

“I don’t know *what* visitors,” I answered, now fully convinced of the truth of my idea, “but some visitors I’m sure are coming.”

“Nonsense, Master Harold,” said Batty, with an attempt to be convincing; “but I must go and clean my back kitchen, else we will be quite—”

Whenever Batty commenced about that

most uninteresting of all subjects, her back kitchen, I invariably made off as fast as I could.

Steyneville Hall, I have remarked before, was very large; some of the upper rooms, indeed, had not been used for years. Impelled by some boyish motive of curiosity, I resolved, as I had nothing better to do in my father's absence, to explore them in the hope of finding some hidden treasure. Sydney came in most opportunely, I thought, and promised with great readiness to assist me in the research.

Panting we climbed the great stone stairs, pausing at each landing to regain the breath we had lost in the ascent. When we, at last, reached the uninhabited part of the house, the air was so gloomy and damp, that it struck quite a chill to my heart. Not so Sydney, who sniffed suspiciously, remarking as he did so —

“What a *de-lightful* smell of old ghosts and—young mice. Shouldn't wonder if we came across some. By-the-bye, Steyneville, I heard a charming tradition of your dead and gone ancestors. One young gentleman

killed another by mistake, and his shade refuses to rest until all the race of the Steyne-ville are no more. Ah," he added, in a tone of moral conviction, "what a comfort that must be to you! You don't know, you haven't the faintest idea what I would give to have a respectable old phantom belonging to our line—but, alack, ours is but of yesterday."

"O, do be quiet, Sydney," I expostulated. "What for? *I'm* not fearful of inspiring their ghostly majesties with dread if you are—but fun apart, let's turn the handle of this door; it looks—"

The rest of the sentence was lost by his giving an energetic push at the door, which despite his efforts remained closed.

"Here, old chap, lend a hand, too, will you?" asked Sydney.

I complied with the request, and by the force of our combined efforts the door opened, and rather more suddenly than we anticipated, too.

The room in which we entered so abruptly was in total darkness. The blinds were drawn, and a smell of must, dust, and

mildew pervaded the atmosphere. Stapleton, nothing daunted, groped his way to the window; and, after some struggling, succeeded in drawing the heavy curtains aside, and letting in a little of the cheerful light of the now setting sun.

“ That’s a little gayer; what think you, Steynevile ? ”

I assented, and we both took a silent survey of the apartment. It was not particularly large, and the furniture was covered completely. I raised the covering of a couch, and found the stuff to be of an exquisite blue colour, a little faded, and finely embroidered.

“ This has been a lady’s room, evidently,” said Sydney; “ but beyond the fact of its having been tenanted by a lovely creature now defunct, I see it hath no other interest, so let us, then, take our departure— But, stay; what’s that picture on the wall, with its face turned ? We might as well see that before we continue our exploration in other quarters. What do you say, Steynevile ? Do you think it’s worth the trouble ? ”

“ By all means,” cried I. “ I never even

knew that there was a picture in either of these rooms."

Stapleton, as curious as I, gently raised the picture, and twisted it with its face towards us. Simultaneously we uttered a cry of astonishment, for, painted by a wonderful hand, a wonderful face looked down upon us from the frame!

It was a full-length portrait of a fair woman, clad in snowy white robes, with a broad sash of crimson tied negligently about her waist; a woman with a face once seen never to be forgotten, not only for its mere physical beauty and regularity of feature, but for possessing an expression at once sweet and proud. The lines of the mouth were curved downwards, and by a hair's-breadth escaped haughtiness. But her eyes—I wonder still how the painter could have endowed them with such life. Like a second Pygmalion, he must have stolen Celestial fire to have given them their marvellous living light. At the foot of the picture was written, in black letters, "Irene Steyneville"—my mother's name, having seen it once in the family Bible.

Sydney was the first to break the pause which followed the discovery.

“Let old Smiler” (that was his tutor) “speak to me of Helen of Troy, Venus, or the rest of that set again. Bah!” he said contemptuously, “I’ll laugh in his face.”

But my thoughts were far away, and his approbation of our find found no echo from my heart. I stood transfixed and silent, filled with a strange foreboding of some impending ill.

“Who is it?” he said at last. “Enlighten me on the subject if you can, Steyneville, and don’t, for the love you bear me, stand staring like a mooncalf, or”—he was at a loss for a similitude, so he added hesitatingly—“a poet!”

“Who is that?” I answered, shuddering; “it is my mother. But come away from this place; the damp and mildew has made me ill.”

CHAPTER IV.

STAPLETON had gone home, and I was alone again, and so filled with the thoughts that my mother's picture had aroused, that I did not hear my father's ring, nor his footsteps along the passage. So deep was my meditation, that the door was opened before my mind was fully aroused to the fact that my father had returned. With a cry of joy, I rose from my chair; but no sooner had I done so, than I fell back, and gazed with unmitigated astonishment on that which met my sight—my father, holding two little girls by the hand, two little girls, one of which looked up into my face with most bewitching, questioning eyes, and the other who seemed to cling closer to the kind hand which closed softly over the little one.

“Father,” I said, looking from one to the other, “who are they?”

“These,” he answered, “are your cousins, Harold;” and, in a low tone, he added, “I know you thought you had no relations. These are the children of my sister, who married a villain, who, spent her fortune, and broke her heart by deserting her. To make a long matter short, he left these little ones in my care till the time comes—God forbid it ever should—when he will have sufficient wherewith to offer them a home, and take them from my charge. But I don’t think he will come back again, for he has gone a long way to seek a fortune. Meanwhile—”

“Meanwhile?” I asked, as he paused.

“We will try to be to these orphans what they have lost. Come, Almyra, kiss your new cousin, Harold,” he said, in a gayer tone, addressing the pretty one. The other, I noticed, was an ordinary-looking child, in a plain dress.

Almyra advanced towards me, with her forefinger in her mouth; but as soon as she had come half-way, retreated precipitately

behind her uncle's coat. My father laughed good-humouredly, and caught the pretty child in his arms.

"Now, Annie," he said, turning to the other, "will *you* kiss your cousin? Look, Almyra has made him cry."

I was feigning to do so, but felt very much piqued indeed. I laugh now as I think of that scene, but my little cousin's manner nettled me at the time to a great extent, and I felt as if I would very willingly have seen her laughing face change to a crying one. But I was soon comforted. Annie, seeing me with my face in my hands, as if really lamenting, ran towards me with a pitying look, and before I was aware, had clasped her arms round my neck, and was saying —

"O, poor, poor cousin; don't cry. Allie doesn't really mean it; and if you like she will kiss you too, but don't, don't cry."

"There," said my father, watching us with a more amused expression on his countenance than I had ever seen it wear, "there, Miss Almyra; won't you embrace your cousin now that you have made so much mischief?"

“ Nay,” cried missie; “ I won’t tiss tousin. He is a big, big baby to try, and I won’t tiss babies; ” and she shook her bright head from side to side most resolutely.

“ How old are you, darling? ” asked my father, stroking her head caressingly.

“ I am six,” she returned, “ and Annie is seven, eight, nine; and O, you naughty tousin, you haven’t been trying (crying) not a bit. Not one little bit, O you nasty, *naughty*, NAUGHTY — ” Unable to express her indignation in adequate epithets, my little cousin laid her head on my father’s shoulder and wept most piteously.

I was compelled to pretend to cry again before she would as much as raise her head to listen to gentle remonstrances. As I commenced my lamentations the little despot left off, and brightened up visibly.

“ Now make friends,” said my father, putting Almyra on her feet, “ and then Batty shall put you to bed.”

“ Don’t want make flends,” cried Almyra, pouting. “ Don’t want go to bed. Want to stay with uncle,” running up to him and throwing her arms about her amused kins-

man. She reached but very little higher than his top-boots. Annie, who had not moved from my side, looked wistfully on.

“But,” reasoned my father, striving hard to hide the smile that forced itself upon his lips, “we have made a long journey, and I want to go to sleep, too. Come, be a darling; go down with cousin and have some nice supper, then say good-night, and go to bed like a good little girl. Annie, you will, will you not, if I ask you?” he said, addressing the other appealingly.

“Yes; I will do anything you ask me, uncle,” answered my little kinswoman, readily. “Will you take me, cousin, where uncle bids?” she added, raising her gentle eyes to mine.

I rose to go down with my cousins, but Almyra refused to move most strenuously. My father shrugged his shoulders helplessly, and told me to take Annie, and to send Batty up for the little rebel, whom he strove to melt into submission by promises of obtaining anything she wished. But all his cajolement availed nothing. Almyra remained obstinate, and I descended with my

other little charge. No sooner had our feet touched the last step, when I heard my father's voice calling for me. Hastily consigning Annie into the care of my old nurse, I obeyed the summons, and re-entered the room which I had left but a minute before.

“Here, Harold; Almyra will go now, won't you?” asked her uncle.

“Allie don't like tousin; tousin nasty to go away with Annie. Annie nasty too. No, shan't go,” she said, stamping her little foot imperiously. “Allie stay with uncle;” and she clambered up into my father's lap, and ensconced herself very comfortably in his arms. “Now go away, tousin.” Grasping her protector's neck ruffles in her chubby little hands, and staring with her great eyes into his face, she crooned a little baby song, and so fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER V.

A WEEK after, and my two little kinswomen were fairly settled in their new home. Little Almyra had begun to take more kindly to me, and allowed me to carry her up and down when she was tired, and do various offices for her, which her little despotic majesty was pleased enough to reward sometimes with a gracious kiss. In short, we were all her devoted slaves, from the usually crusty Birch upwards. Stapleton, too, who was impervious to everything but mischief, was never so happy as when chasing Almyra in the garden, or nursing her. I cannot think how the child could have wound herself around the heart of that inconstant, butterfly-like being; but that she possessed

more of his affection and devotion than any other living creature, there was not the remotest doubt. He would climb to any branch of a tree, no matter what height, to obtain the coveted bird's-nest for her little ladyship ; he would endanger his life by reaching for the water-lily miss had a desire to possess ; he would do anything, in short, she wished, and a great deal more to boot.

Annie was timid, shy, and retiring. Poor child ! I don't think she was well understood by anybody, saving my father and myself. Since the first night of her arrival I had liked my little kinswoman extremely well, and I know the feeling was reciprocated. She had been neglected at home since her mother's death ; her father had left her to strangers' care because she did not happen to be as pretty as her younger sister. Already she knew she was the plainer of the two. Even her dresses were all dark, and without a vestige of trimming on them, while Almyra's, on the contrary, were gay and bright, elaborately ornamented with ribbons and fallals of various descriptions and hues. One day as the two came-

down dressed in their gala clothes, my father noticed the difference. They were going to take tea with my Lady Stapleton, Sydney's mother, who, persuaded by him, had asked permission of my father for their company.

“Annie,” said my father, “why did you not put on a prettier frock, like Allie, to go to Lady Stapleton's in?”

“I—I—have no other,” answered the child. “But indeed, indeed, 'tis not my fault,” she added, brokenly.

For the first time in my life, I heard her guardian break into a round oath. Regretting his violence, he called for Batty, who made her appearance with a curtsey and a very wondering face.

“To-morrow,” said my father, “take Miss Annie Marlande to town, and see that her dresses should be made exactly like her sister's.”

Batty made another bob, *anglicé* curtsey, and retired with a sigh of relief. Although my father had been the kindest of masters, she had always a positive dread of him.

A few days after the foregoing, when

Annie appeared in one of her new frocks, Almyra burst out a-crying most violently. When asked why she cried, she answered, between her sobs, that—

“ Papa—had—always—said—that—Allie was—much—more—pwetty—than—Annie, and—now—now—there—was—no—dif-difference—if—she—was—dwessed—like—Allie.”

Where this mite of six could have learnt this worldliness Heaven only knows. I cannot help thinking that some natures are worldly from their very cradles, and even if they mix with the most simple society remain unchanged; and others, again, associating from infancy upwards with callous and egotistical beings, retain their pristine simplicity and ingenuousness of manner and mind.

CHAPTER VI.

AMONGST our visitors of note was a certain Lord Halifax Alingdale—handsome, opulent, and young. Possessing these advantages, one would have supposed an ordinary man to be content with his lot; but my lord was not. Impatient and restless, he had already from early youth plunged into the wildest excesses and debaucheries; and now almost tired of every pleasure that life and wealth could give, he cursed his fate incessantly. My father, indeed, was the only person whose counsel made any impression on him. He believed in nothing, and sneered at everything and everybody—himself most of all. As he plays an important part in this history, I will endeavour to describe his person.

In stature, he was tall and lithe. His countenance was at once striking and repell-
ing; being perfectly clean shaven, his finely-
chiselled features were clear and handsome as
a cameo's. His eyes, of some dark nameless
hue, more elongated than wide, and rather
deeply sunk into his head, were surmounted
by long black eyebrows. His mouth was ex-
ceptionally small, indeed, almost effeminate,
but for the strange expression it invariably
wore. The corners were curved upwards into
a half-smile; inexpressibly bitter and dark.
His fine chesnut coloured hair fell in natural
curls over his shoulders; although Mr.
Harley, or St. John, I forget which, had
made ribands very modish, my lord pre-
ferred, though in every other way very
fastidious in his dress, to be old-fashioned
in this one particular style. Although always
habited with neatness and excellent taste,
rather than be considered a coxcomb or a
fop, I think he would have sooner erred the
other way. His tolerance and utter indif-
ference passed for good-humour; so that he
was extremely popular with almost all. His
conversation was mostly clever, though often

caustic and bitter. His sarcasm, indeed, could be so barbed and pointed that his enemies—and he had many—scarcely cared to come within the range of his poisoned shafts.

I introduce him in the earlier part of the history because it was he that so materially changed the course of my life. My father intended, after two years' study at Cambridge later on, that I should enter the army, and there endeavour to distinguish myself, as many Steynevilles had done before me. My lord happened to hear of these arrangements for my future one night. Both he and my father were discussing the merits and demerits of a military life. As Allie and Annie were both in bed, I had nothing to do but sit in a corner of the room, to read or listen, as I felt disposed. My lord had never addressed me beyond, “How art thou, boy?” “Good-bye,” etc., and I feel sure that he looked upon me as a little milksop. Why, I cannot say; unless it was that when he came in to visit my father for half-an-hour in the evening, he invariably saw me sitting very

sedately and composed with a volume or having a romp with my two little kins-women.

“Indeed, sir,” said my father’s guest; “surely you can’t mean yon little sober book-worm to enter upon a life seemingly so very unsuitable for a lad of his habits. The Church,” with slight irony, he added, “is far better adapted for such gentle and timid dispositions.”

“Harold,” cried my father, smiling, “do you hear? What think you of my lord’s proposition?”

I rose from my place and came nearer to the light. My Lord Alingdale must have seen a very flushed face and sparkling eye belonging to the “little sober book-worm.”

“I was intended for the army,” I said warmly, “and I will —”

“Ah,” interrupted my lord, raising his hand slightly, “pardon me, if you judge by the pretty dress military men wear, my lad. I consider you are actuated by an impulse at once disinterested and charming. Indeed, I know nothing that affords me greater satisfaction than to view a regiment of pretty

fellows prettily dressed, and I think others are of my mind too. But all that glitters is not gold. Work — ”

“ I am not afraid of it,” I interrupted hotly in my turn, unlike Falstaff, with far more courage than discretion.

“ Come,” said my lord, with a bantering air which annoyed me excessively, “ think yourself in the army now, and someone (impolitely, I must confess, but that cannot be helped, as really some of the men are greatly wanting in every-day civilities) were to call you a coward, or any other opprobrious epithet you can imagine to yourself, what would you do?”

In less time than the question took to ask, and completely carried away with indignation at the thought of a Steyneville being called one, I whipped out my little dirk, brandished it in good style and answered —

“ This is what I would do, my lord.”

“ Bravo! excellent, my young Trojan. Who would have guessed you had so much pluck in your young body! How old are you?” cries my lord, highly amused.

“ I am twelve,” I replied, bowing, not for-

getting my good manners this time ; “ and at your service, my lord.”

“ I warrant you a gay time if you were. What say you, Mr. Steyneville, will you let him come to me ? ” he asked eagerly, but almost immediately his animated countenance became clouded, and he laughed bitterly as he added, “ Bah ! I am a moral specimen of humanity to be entrusted with the care of youth, particularly where ‘ les moeurs ’ are concerned.”

“ Ah, my lord,” responded my father, “ he has not finished his studies yet, although I should like him to see a little of the world before he enters college life.

“ Certainly, quite right,” interrupted my father’s guest suddenly. “ Can you speak French ? ”

I bowed in acquiescence, rather astonished at the suddenness of the question.

“ You are surprised, I see. I will explain the reason of my asking you. Lady Olympia Norton, a kinswoman of mine, has of late been turning the earth over for a page of good education and family, and one who can speak French. Now I think as the situation is

an extremely advantageous one, and that you are likely to suit her and yourself, which is of far greater importance—you only need be good-looking, quick-witted, and brave to please her fastidious ladyship, and that you certainly are," observed my lord, looking at me critically.

I blushed very ingenuously under his scrutiny.

"Ah, THAT school will cure you soon enough, my lad, of modesty—I mean of shame-facedness regarding your own merits, but that is something gained. At college they would tease the life out of you if you blushed each time anyone lauded you as a pretty fellow; but what do you say to my proposition, Mr. Steyneville? And you, young gentleman, what do you think of the scheme?"

I looked at my father eagerly, and as he caught my glad eyes he stifled a sigh and said—

"I think, nay, I am sure we cannot do better than accept your generous offer. Yes, Harold, it is better that you should spread your wings a little for the first flight from

the parent nest, until you leave it for ever," he said, half sadly and half mirthfully. "If you can arrange the matter, my lord, Harold will be thankful to accept the situation, and I am sure, I will be obliged to you for obtaining it."

"Say no more," answered my lord, "the affair is arranged. Now, Master Harold, what say you?"

I was speechless for the moment. I who had never quitted my dear father's side for eleven years, and he who had been my constant kind protector and companion, were going to part! And it was his will, whilst I knew it was for my good. As I looked at him with his head bent sorrowfully to the ground—alone in the world but for me—I knew how much it cost him to make the sacrifice, so instead of answering my questioner I ran to my kind father's side, knelt on the ground, took his dearly-loved hand in mine and kissed it reverently. Only when I was on the point of losing, and when I had lost his guiding hand and gentle voice, was I fully aware of my great and irreparable loss.

My tears fell fast on the hand which I

clasped; let it be remembered I was so very young then, so unskilled in the world's cold ways. Such a simple lad; not even ashamed of his tender heart!

My lord saw my tears, and evidently misconstrued them.

“What, crying already!” said he, with an almost imperceptible sneer, “that's a bad beginning. O, fie! and not yet left papa's wing, and you would fight for your queen and country. Ha! ha!”

My blood was up—fairly boiling—as I rose to my feet and cried—

“God shall not find me wanting in love—and no one shall find me wanting in courage, my lord. If I weep to leave you, dear father, you will not think me a coward, I know,” I added, dashing the tears from my eyes with the back of my hand. “Indeed—indeed, if any but my father's guest had said—”

“You would take summary vengeance on the insolent person, no doubt,” interrupted Lord Halifax, laconically. “But, frankly speaking, I like both you and your pluck, youngster—so—shall we be friends?” holding out his delicate hand and smiling.

I could not resist him, although he had made me angry but a moment before, so shaking hands with cordiality, a friendship began there and then which ended only with death.

My Lord Halifax, true to his promise, had arranged all preliminaries with his kinswoman, Lady Norton, and about a month after the preceding conversation, my trunks stood in the hall, ready to be conveyed to the residence of my future mistress, and I, their owner, torn by conflicting emotions, sate sad and silent the eve previous to my departure, in company with my father. Little Annie had already advanced towards me twice, but meeting no smile of welcome, and seeing me downcast, she had retreated into a corner, ever and anon peeping from her place with wistful eyes, wondering, no doubt, why Hally (neither of the two would call me Harold) was so different to-night. Almyra had pouted at my glumness, and had fled for amusement to the ready arms of Stapleton, who could tell stories of fairies and beautiful princesses, “although the high-born damsels were never so pretty

as Allie," so the legend-spinner whispered ; a saving-clause that the listener loved to hear almost as much as she liked to munch the young viscount's comfits as she sate upon his knee. I was thinking of a multitude of things, and although the thoughts of the change which the morrow would bring lay uppermost in my mind — my heart was assailed by the picture, the picture of my mother, which I had seen some time ago, the same day that my cousins arrived. Since then I had scarcely ever ceased pondering over the strange circumstances attendant on the finding of the portrait. Day and night the subject had haunted me. Why had my father never spoken of her to me ? Why had he shown such anguish once when I mentioned her name ? Why was her picture discarded, instead of being honoured, and loved, and hung in a room where our eyes could rest on it every day, with tender thoughts as of one beautiful and gentle, who was no more—why, I say, did it hang with its face to the wall in a lonely and desolate room ?

I had often been on the point of asking

my dear father about the mystery which shrouded my mother's name, but something invariably prevented the words from issuing from my lips. How impatiently I longed for the time when, the children being in bed and Stapleton gone, I would at last be able to ask for an explanation before my departure.

When Batty appeared at the door to summon my little kinswomen to bed, Stapleton rose to go. We bade each other an affectionate farewell, albeit boyish, promising ourselves gay times at college, where it was intended we should go together. I listened with bated breath till the last echo of his footstep died away on the stone passage, then I turned towards my father, feeling decidedly uncomfortable, for although I had gained my wish, I did not know how to launch into the matter which so oppressed me.

I think, as his eyes met mine, he half guessed, as he pressed his hand to his forehead, of what I intended to speak. Even now as I write, I feel perfectly sure that he read my thoughts. Perhaps it was my be-

haviour, less familiar and more constrained than usual, that made him expect, or at least half divine, what was impending. He expressed no surprise as I said —

“ Father, I have never spoken to you of this before, but now, my last night for many months at home, I ask you, I pray you to answer me—who was my mother? why is her picture hung disgracefully in one of those dark rooms upstairs? O, what,” cried I, beside myself, “ what fault was hers that her image should be thus treated now she is dead? ”

“ My boy, I knew this would come at last,” he answered, with an indescribable anguish in his tones and depicted in his face, “ only I thank God that He hath permitted me to withhold the truth, the awful truth, from you so long, that your childhood and innocence has not been embittered with it. My loved son,” he continued, taking my hand, and pressing it tenderly. I shrank from his fingers’ warm clasp, and shuddered convulsively, for my heart was sick and despairing within me, as an awful thought struck me.

“ Am I a —” I could not bring myself

to mention the word, but stood before him pale and horror-stricken, with my eyes fixed on his face, waiting—dreading the answer he might give.

“Thou,” he said, after a pause, speaking with an ineffable tenderness, “whom I have loved and guarded so long and well, can you think so harshly of me? You are my own true son, before God and man I swear it. I have not sinned so grievously, but have been sinned against, by one whose care and smile should have made us both different. Both, did I say? Nay, not thee, for thou couldst not be a greater joy to me than thou art. ‘Tis only myself that has been changed.”

In my joy and thankfulness to hear that my fears had not been realised, I interrupted him and implored his forgiveness, which he readily granted, for the groundless doubts I had harboured against his honour and my happiness, for I *was* happy in the thought of being such a noble man’s son. “But what, dearest father,” I asked, after a silence of some minutes, some of my fears returning as I watched his changed, sad eyes, “what is

the mystery surrounding my dead mother's name, which disturbs you so? Let me share that heavy burden with you. Perhaps," I added, breathlessly, catching at a straw, "the load that one cannot bear, two may with ease."

"Poor boy," returned my father, sorrowfully, "you shall judge for yourself, if you are capable of lightening the weight which has for almost twelve years been, and is still, so heavy upon me."

I sat down near his side, but he rose and paced the apartment with a hasty step, as if the mere act of walking rendered the task of telling me, that which I wished to know, easier.

An unusual scene surely, with the laws of Nature entirely reversed. The father as pleader, the son as judge.

"What I am going to say," began my father, "I will make as brief as possible. Once I dreaded the approach of a time when concealment would be no longer possible, now I thank Heaven that it has come. You must know, Harold, that I was left an orphan at an early age, with no living

relation in the world but a younger sister, whom I fondly loved. I promised my dying mother to remain unmarried until Alice—so was she named—became of age, and married. For she was already the promised bride of the man of whom she ultimately became the wife. We were tolerably wealthy and happy too. Well, to shorten a long story, Alice was united to Mr. M. lande, who turned out to be a wolf in sheep's clothing. He broke her heart, as I told you before, five years after their marriage, by repeated cruelty and infidelity. Now I shall tell you of my unfortunate self. Soon after my sister had left her home, I began to feel myself extremely lonely and miserable; vainly I strove to find the true felicity I had lost. But nothing availed. Steyneville Hall was not the same home I had known it to be when my sister superintended it.

“ I wrote to her regarding my loneliness. She, by return of messenger, invited me to come and stay with her for a few days, saying she had something in store for me—a surprise which, if I were reasonable, would restore something of my former equanimity,

and make the master of Steyneville Hall a brighter man.

“Wondering what her remedy to mend my ills could be, I in all haste repaired to her house. She received me with great affection, and when I asked her what cure she had for my restlessness, she replied by taking me into her boudoir, where a beautiful girl was seated bending over a harpsichord. This woman, whom I had no sooner seen than I loved her, subsequently became my wife. Yes,” answering my look, “your mother. Does it seem strange to you that I speak so calmly now of one whom I loved—more than my life—as my honour? I confess it appears so to me, but—” he passed his hand over his eyes, and paused a minute in his hurried walk—“everything has an end. Regret, love, joy and grief, but hope, never. For she who wronged me beyond all pardon left me thee, my dear boy, to hope.”

“O, my dear father,” I thought, “if ever I wrong you in thought, or deed, I shall indeed be a villain.” As I was about to speak, he stopped me with a wave of his hand.

“ Let me continue,” he said. “ About a year after our marriage you came into the world to crown my happiness.

“ I have forgotten to tell you that we had been keeping much company. Amongst our guests was a certain Lord Beaufort, who had admired your mother before she became my wife. Can you guess the rest? I went abroad for three weeks to attend the bedside of a dying friend; when I came back she was gone.”

“ Gone!” I gasped. “ O father, not with—not with—”

“ Yes, with her former admirer,” he answered, bitterly, “ leaving her infant to the tender mercies of domestics, and her husband to shame—but,” he added, the memory stirring up all the honest indignation of a noble heart, “ I pursued and wounded him in a duel; but he recovered to be fondled and caressed in thy false mother’s arms.”

When I raised my head, for I had fallen almost into a stupor, stunned and sickened by the recital of the wrongs my father had endured, I found I was in the room alone.

CHAPTER VII.

THE next morning I rose betimes, and when I approached the breakfast parlour, judge of my surprise when I saw Lord Halifax one of the party. Little Almyra was busy inspecting the ruffles on his right sleeve, so that he could not extend his hand to me.

“Are you going to take Hally away with you?” she demanded, staying in a very minute inspection of the pattern of my lord’s lace.

“Yes, I am going to take him away,” he returned, looking rather wonderingly on the beautiful upturned eyes of the pretty child.

“What are you going to do with him?” pursued Miss Marlande.

“Do with him?” he repeated, rather

puzzled and much amused with the cross-examiner. "We are going to make a man of him."

"Are you one?"

"Yes," laughing, "or—"

"Nay," interrupted my young kinswoman, "and will he wear such pretty ruffles and coats, and silk *stockys* like you when he is a man?"

"Very likely, if he is good," answered my lord.

"O, how very, very good you must be!" cries miss, folding her hands reverently, "although," coming closer, and holding her head sideways and looking critically at the smiling face before her, "although you do not *look* it."

I had finished a hasty repast, and was awaiting my lord's pleasure. Almyra's answer had enchanted him. The demure little maid, in her pretty dress, looked so winning that he asked her if she would give him a kiss.

She raised her innocent face up to his immediately, and as he pressed his lips to her downy cheek, a pang shot through my heart.

On my conscience I now verily believe it was jealousy. But I had no time to brood. My lord was ready, and the horses were waiting. Embracing my father and cousins hastily, I ran from the room, and in much less time than it takes to relate, mounted and awaited most impatiently the coming of my guide. I did not want anyone to see the emotion which parting had caused me, so I longed to be away. A good hard gallop is a most wonderful preventative of tears ; those who have tried the remedy can no doubt vouch for its excellence.

My father understood the meaning of my abrupt departure, and so he did not escort his guest as usual to the very entrance gates of Steyneville. I turned aside my head, as our horses pushed slowly along, to hide the tears which, despite my strenuous efforts, would well into my eyes, and from thence trickle down my cheek.

“ Not crying, surely ? ” said my lord, rather sneeringly, after we had gone on in silence for some minutes.

“ No—o,” I answered with a gasp, angry with myself and his very perceptible sneer.

“ Show me your face—here, turn it round this way, Steyneville. I bet my life on it that you are ! ”

By an almost superhuman effort, I restrained the tear that was impending, clenched my teeth tightly together, and breathing very quickly, turned round to my companion. He saw the struggle within me, but he was merciless.

“ Hey, my lad,” he said, banteringly, arranging his reins, “ I am sorely afraid if we were to be attacked by some gentleman of the road who wished to lighten our pockets, or scatter our brains to the winds, one of us would look in no very good fighting condition.”

“ I am afraid, my lord,” I returned, as calmly as I could, “ that one of us has not much money to be relieved of, and that the other has—”

“ Not much brain to lose—not bad. Come, you are brightening up now,” he replied, and so saying he raised his left hand to check the action of his horse, and smiled. That strange dark smile, half mirth and half bitterness.

As I looked on the hand that held the rein, I remarked with surprise that the ruffle that had half covered his fingers before was gone.

“Are you wondering where my lace has gone?” he asked, my look not escaping his sharp eyes.

“Yes, my lord, I must confess,” I said, “I am.”

“You cannot guess?” interrupted the young man. “That little Circe, your cousin, is making a doll’s bonnet or what not of it by this time, I expect.”

So he had disfigured his dress merely to satisfy the passing caprice of the saucy child. I mused deeply for some minutes, so deeply indeed that I started in my saddle as I heard the word, pronounced ominously enough—

“Halt!”

Quick as thought, and quite as deftly, I drew from the holster a pistol, which I had loaded myself in case of emergency, and looked up.

Two ill-looking fellows mounted on sorry nags, and masked, had seized the reins of my lord’s horse. Looking on me as a child, they

evidently thought they had but one to deal with.

“What do you want, you fools?” asked my lord contemptuously, not even blanching before the pistol held by one of them so close to his temple.

“Throw over the palaver; give us your purse, curse me,” cried one.—“None of your airs, my lord, or d——n my stars if I don’t draw the trigger! Give me the brooch you’ve got stuck in that very pretty lace o’ yours; it’ll just do for my Polly,” said the second, with a kind of savage grim humour.

“If you will kindly permit me to present you, as a gentleman to gentlemen, my belongings, I shall be most delighted to deliver them,” quoth my lord, courteously; “but really, you know,” he added, with a slight shrug of the shoulders, “I—” and with a swift movement he drew his sword and sent the highwayman’s pistol spinning into mid-air.

The other one, with an oath, had cocked his, and was about to send his shot straight to my lord’s heart. But I was too quick for him. Whiz! bang! and the contents of my staunch little pistol were buried in his

arm, and with a howl of anguish, he spurred his horse into a mad gallop and fled precipitately, followed by his companion. Only when they were long out of sight did Lord Halifax turn to me.

“Thank you, Steyneville,” he said, very simply; “I shall never forget that service. But come, spur your horse, or we will be late, and my lady Norton will think I have led you into some mischief or other.”

CHAPTER VIII.

My lady Olympia Norton was a woman of about thirty years old. Tall and commanding, she possessed all those outward attractions which constitute beauty. But still she was not beautiful. Her carriage was too decided and energetic to be entirely in accordance with those rules that the admirers of gentle loveliness have lain down. Her features were fine and regular; her black hair was combed off a forehead marvellously white and broad; and her eyes were large and bright. But her features, her eyes, expression, and deportment belonged rather to a man than a woman. Generous and kindly, cynical and good-humoured, scorn-

ful and passionate by turns, my lady was the only woman that I have met with in my life, an impossible being for a man to love. Praise and admiration were plentifully bestowed upon her, but not affection. She seemed as far removed from a desire to please or the wish to instil a passion as the mighty Pyramids themselves.

My lady, like her kinsman, Lord Halifax, was unmarried, but being hospitably and socially inclined, her castle was always full of visitors.

After I had been presented to my future mistress my lord told her of what he was pleased to call bravery, and which was in reality nothing more than a lucky shot.

The recital of the adventure evidently pleased my lady.

“Come here—”

“Harold,” put in my lord.

“Harold, c'est un joli garçon, ma foi,” she cried, taking my hand.

I blushed, and bowed.

“I am quite of your opinion,” said my lord, lazily, “and modest, too, which is still more astonishing nowadays.”

“Are you going to preach us a sermon, beau cousin ?” said my lady, elevating her dark eyebrows.

“O, dear no. Confound—I’m sure I beg your pardon.”

“There’s no occasion,” laughed his kinswoman. “If you wish or have a mind to confound, why, confound ! I have nothing against it. Pray do not let my presence disturb you. Now, Harold,” she continued, turning to me, “what can you do ?”

“Madam,” said I, by this time grown bolder, “I can listen, see, obey, and keep silence, if —”

“Not another word ; that pleases me much,” cried my mistress. “Cousin Alingdale, c'est un trésor que vous m'avez apporté,” she added, in a lower voice, to my lord, who was leaning on the table with his chin resting on his hand. “But what on earth have you done with your sleeve ? Where is your ruffle ?” she asked, surprisedly.

“I am in love,” answered her kinsman.

“Will you be kind enough to enlighten me, M. le Bizarre, on this point, what your ruffle has to do with your being in love ?”

“Greatly. My love admired my ruffle;
Ergo, my love *hath* my ruffle.”

“Who is this new strange ladylove of yours who asks only for ruffles?”

“She is beautiful,” answered my lord, with one of his strange smiles. “She is young, she is charming, she is accomplished, she is bewitching, and she is *good*.”

“Ah,” said my lady, seriously, “if she is all what you say, Alingdale, be true for once in your life—be honest; change your dissipated existence; give up all those debaucheries into which you so heedlessly plunge; become—”

“And become a saint. Nay,” he answered, laughingly. “But flattery apart, Burnet himself need not have been ashamed of that prologomena. If I am not much mistaken, fair cousin Olympia, you were going to launch into a glorious dissertation on the joys of marriage, hey!”

“Cousin, cousin,” said my mistress with a sigh, “will you always be the same? But this young lady, tell me, does she know what—”

“What I am? No, she does not; in fact,

she considers me half an angel," he returned.

" You an angel," she repeated, incredulously; " no, that's too much, cousin Hal."

" 'Tis so," he said, " nevertheless. I really don't know, being so infatuated with her, that I would not offer myself, but there is an obstacle, an insurmountable obstacle," he added solemnly, " that preventeth me from carrying out my half-formed plan."

" And that is?—questioned his kinswoman.

" That is—her age," answered the reprobate.

" How old is she, then? " demanded my lady, almost breathlessly.

" She is—seven, if I am not mistaken. But I will leave you now, to dress. I suppose my room is ready, fair cousin? "

There was always an apartment in Norton Castle for my mistress's kinsman.

" By-the-bye, Olympia," said my lord, pausing as he turned the handle of the door, " for the love of mercy and other sublime virtues don't send up one of your ugly old catmarans to me when I ring. I really

cannot understand," he added, with a look of injured innocence, " why it is."

" No, poor fellow," said my lady, with a slight sneer, " I will have mercy; I will send Hilbert to you when you ring."

Hilbert was an old man-servant, and had been in my lady Norton's father's employ.

" Ugh! worse and worse," answered my lord, with a grimace. " When I see that old villain he always reminds me of some fungus-grown hobgoblin."

Although my lady's kinsman always jeered at the old servant, none were really kinder to him. It was my lord who gave him a "dot" for his daughter who married the young butcher, who sent his wife wine and game and other delicacies in her last illness, who placed one of his boys in a good situation, and paid for the other's schooling and clothing; it was my lord, in brief, who was the old man's chief benefactor and tormentor.

Then my lord left the room, and I remained alone with my mistress, wondering what was going to happen next and what

my duties were. I did not remain long in ignorance.

“Are you fond of reading?” asked my lady directly after my lord had left the room.

As my favourite occupation was named, I felt my face flush with pleasure as I replied, with a little more warmth than was absolutely necessary —

“Indeed, madam, I love it.”

This answer, like my preceding ones, had the good fortune of meeting with my lady’s entire approval.

“Good,” she replied; “you shall read to me my letters, French and English. I will have you read for two hours to me daily. See, I have some very good works;” and she pointed to a beautifully carved bookcase which stood at one end of the chamber.

“Ah, how thankful I am, my lady,” said I, with sincere gratitude.

I took the white hand extended to me and kissed it.

“If you would please me, Harold, when you are alone with me, and when you speak to me, let it be in French. Ah, France —” She

checked herself as she remarked my undisguised wonder. "You seem surprised," she said, coldly, "that I ask what I do, but I am of French extraction—my mother was French, and my prince is in France—therefore I love all that is French."

"So my lady is a Jacobite," thought I as I bowed in obedience to her commands; but I said nothing.

"Now," she continued with a smile, "as you understand me, I hope we will get on well together, as I think we shall. For the present," she added, ringing a silver hand-bell, "you will be shown to your room. Hilbert," addressing the old servant who had just entered the room, "show Mr. Harold to his room and give him all he requires."

Bowing again, I left my new mistress and followed my guide to another part of the castle. Once alone in the apartment destined for my use, and which was as comfortable as could be, I was unreasonable enough to fling myself on the bed and burst into a passion of tears. O, I felt so lonely, so desolate, amongst these worldly strangers, so forsaken, so very, very home-sick, that

I half-intended to write home and say I would die (it is always the same with young people when they leave home for the first time) if I could not return. But presently, when the storm abated, I began to feel thoroughly ashamed of my cowardice, and when, as I rose and saw my tear-stained face in the glass, I rated myself soundly. "So," said I, "you young whimpering mollicoddle, you would cry for nothing, would you? and you would distinguish yourself in the army. O, for shame! for shame! Fie on your child's heart!"

The iron entered my soul. I firmly resolved to shed no more tears. And I did not.

Having dressed myself to my complete satisfaction, and put on my best ruffles, I sat down, and for the first time recollect ed that when I was dressed I would not know what to do. The castle was so large that I did not dare venture to go through the corridors for fear of losing myself.

Casting myself in the hands of Providence, I opened a trunk, and, after much rummaging, succeeded in getting a book. I trimmed

the light afresh, and composed myself to read.

I had scarcely forgotten my situation, in following the humours of M. Alceste in the “Misanthrope,” when I was aroused by a knocking at the door.

“Come in,” said I.

“Ha, Steyneville, ready? Come along, then,” answered a well-known voice preceded by the figure of Lord Alingdale, finely dressed.

I prepared to follow, wondering to what place I was going to be led, but as I was beginning to feel decidedly hungry after the excitement of the day, I thought rightly that dinner was served.

After traversing various corridors, and descending several flights of stairs, we reached the dining-hall, where, at a long, elegantly laid-out table, many people were already seated. We took our places, my lord *vis-à-vis* to me, and I between two ladies, one young and the other old.

My lady Norton had already acquainted them all of the paltry service I had rendered her kinsman that morning in the encounter

with the highwaymen, and so I was the object of general observation, the dinner passing off with a vast amount of encomiums on my prowess, which made me blush rather awkwardly. My pretty neighbour, a sprightly Frenchwoman, with a small, arch face, was perfectly merciless in her epithets of approbation on my courage. Instead of gratifying my vanity, their eulogiums had a perfectly opposite effect, and I felt as angry and hurt as if I had met with obloquy and reproach instead of praise. *Then* I thought they did not mean it—now I think differently.

The dinner was at an end. The ladies had left the table, and about a dozen gentlemen sat laughing and talking over their wine. My lord had thrown himself into an easy chair, apart from the others, and seemed to be entirely preoccupied with his thoughts. No very pleasant ones, judging by his frowning smile. The conversation indulged in by these gentlemen was not of a kind fit for polite ears; indeed, my face became as crimson as Lord Alingdale's coat, through their profanity and looseness of speech.

“ What's up with you, Alingdale ? ” called

a middle-aged, stoutish tippler from the other end of the table. “If you don’t look as if you had been crossed in something or other, may my namesake come and take me instanter!”

This gentleman’s name I afterwards learned was Colonel Death; and a very good-humoured personage he looked.

“Bah!” exclaimed my lord, peevishly. “Crossed! You speak as if I were a child; here, pass the wine, you Hilbert. D——n me, how slow you are,” he said angrily to the old servant, as with a trembling hand he filled his glass.

“By Jove, Alingdale, what a Tartar you are to-night!” remonstrated the Colonel, taking a seat by me, lately vacated by the pretty Frenchwoman.

My lord answered nothing, but drank deeply, the conversation continuing, though with less noise, for he, usually the life and soul of these genial spirits was silent and dull to-night.

“What is your name, my lad?” asked the Colonel, kindly, noticing my heightened colour

and shocked expression ; “ don’t listen to ‘em, but speak to me.”

“ Thank you, sir,” I replied. “ My name is Harold Steyneville.”

“ Steyneville, Steyneville,” repeated the Colonel ; “ the name is perfectly familiar to me. Stay—I have it—of Steyneville Hall ? ”

I replied in the affirmative.

“ You’re the son of Henry Steyneville ? And your mother — ” (I turned pale)—“ is dead.”—(I breathed freely again.)—“ Poor boy, it is hard to lose those we love, I know, ain’t it ? ” said this great rough man, gently. He did not know the truth. I inwardly thanked Heaven that all the world was not aware of that disgrace.

I bowed my head as if in acquiescence to his last words.

“ Lord,” continued the Colonel, “ why, your father and I were great chums once. At College we used to call him Saint Steyneville, not that he didn’t have the courage of a lion, though, but because he was different to we fellows, somehow. He would never swear or get drunk as we did ; and yet,” he mused,

“ not one of us dared to call him milksop, or any other name, or else, by Jove, there was far more of the devil to deal with than the saint.”

“ What on earth are you cackling about, Death ? ” asked a pert young gentleman across the table.

“ Never you mind,” remarked the person addressed, impressively. “ I didn’t ask *you* to listen, did I ? ”

The abrupt question, put with military-like brevity and gravity, brought the crimson blood to a cheek that had not blushed for many a long day.

“ Well, I only asked,” said the young gentleman, apologetically.

“ And I only answered,” returned the Colonel. “ I was not speaking to you—so I hope that’s enough.”

“ By heaven,” cried the other fiercely, springing up and putting his hand to his sword, “ do you wish to insult me ? ”

The Colonel shrugged his shoulders.

“ Gentlemen, gentlemen, the ladies will hear ; be reconciled, pray,” cried one.

“ By God,” said the younger man, pas-

sionately, to the one who intervened, “Talbot, he has insulted me. Let me go.”

“Where to?” broke in my Lord Alingdale, suddenly, who had hitherto been a silent spectator of the scene; “and when you know where to, tell us all what for?”

These words, spoken with a comical serenity, had the desired effect. The whole company, insulter and insulted, burst out a-laughing, after which the antagonists shook hands and were friends, and all went on as before.

Suddenly there were cries for a song. Colonel Death, with characteristic good humour, rose and proposed in a neat speech that he would favour the assembled company. In a stentorian voice, perfectly innocent and free from the slightest approach to melody or harmony, the merry owner of the dismal name commenced, what he was pleased to dub, a song. The chorus, in which all but my lord vociferously joined, was:

“For he who loves not love nor wine,
Shall ne'er be foe or friend of mine.
Tra la, tra la, tra la, la, la,” etc.

The other part I have completely forgotten. Plainly, the whole, perhaps, was not worth

remembering, only that it led to an incident. But—to use that phrase which has been used since time immemorial, and to all likelihood will be used to eternity—let me not anticipate.

When the Colonel resumed his seat a difficulty arose. The gentlemen wanted another song, and there was no one to sing it. Those who could were already entirely oblivious to the cares of this world and the uncertainty of the next. No less than six of the tipplers lay under the table, not under the influence of the liquors they had imbibed—O dear no! the dinner and the lights had invariably the same effect upon them every night.

“Harold,” cried my lord, suddenly—he had been drinking more than any of them, and yet was perfectly cool—“your father told me you could sing like a—let me see, was it a bird—yes, I think it was. Come, let’s hear you, my lad; anything you will, but make haste. Gentlemen,” he added, turning with half a sneer to those whom he was pleased to call so, “my young preserver, my highwaymen intimidator, will now favour us. Silence, if you please.”

“My lord,” I began, trembling, all those

eyes bent upon me, and the oppressive silence, “I am afraid my —”

“Bah! anything will do,” interrupted my lord, “don’t be afraid.”

“Ay, my lad, strike up,” interposed the Colonel; “damme, we ain’t such an amalgamation of talent here that you need show the white feather, are we?”

“No!” from all sides.

“Now then, young gentleman,” cried Captain Talbot, good-naturedly.

“Mon Dieu, comme il est lâche!” murmured a French gentleman at the end of the table, whose looks I did not like.

“De la Motte,” exclaimed Colonel Death, taking my part, addressing the handsome, though evil-looking gentleman significantly, “I can’t understand your heathenish lingo, but you are saying nothing very pretty about the boy, I know. Just leave him alone, will you, and oblige yours truly?”

“Ma foi! how droll you are, my Colonel.” He pronounced it Coll-o-nelle. “I —”

“Are you going to begin,” cries my lord, impatiently, “or are we to stay here all night?”

His tones resolved me, and I began, timidly at first, but gaining courage as I sang on, for I was again in my dear home, near my father. Again I saw the weird grounds through the open windows. I forgot my surroundings, I forgot everything. The gentlemen, the lights, levity, strangeness, all vanished. I was alone, save with my dear protector, singing the song that he loved—

“WHERE THE VIOLET GROWS.”

“Where the violet grows,
On the wood’s green ground,
Where the west wind blows
Soft sighs around,

“Where the running stream
Its clear course flows,
Where the moon’s soft beam
Her silver throws,

“Where the tender thought
That Youth once bore—
Ere cold Truth taught—
Comes back once more,

“Where the violet grows
In the deep wold’s glen,
Where the west wind blows
From the ways of men,

“Would I gladly flee
If Heav’n once more
Gave back to me
The trust of yore.”

When I came to the last line the unbidden tears started to my eyes. I was prepared to hear a roar of laughter. Instead, when I had finished, they one and all declared that, though the words were tame enough, the song was good, and the singer better. In brief, I had pleased all but M. de la Motte, who said that, as everyone was delighted with psalm-singing, he would ask M. l'Abbé, on his right hand, to be good enough to preach them a sermon there and then on temperance, after which, he said, the wine might be taken away, and all might twiddle their thumbs, cast up their eyes, and groan for their sins.

M. de la Motte had taken a dislike to me, that was certain, and I, on my part, as I caught his dark, fine, sinister eyes bent upon me, felt

“ The reason why, I can tell thee not,
But I do not like thee—De la Motte ! ”

CHAPTER IX.

TIME went on, and I had been already six months in my lady's service, when I commenced to notice a strange fact, viz. : that M. de la Motte had wound himself into my mistress's good graces, and that he was a more frequent visitor at the castle than any-one else, excepting her kinsman, my Lord Alingdale.

Time went on, but the first bad impression made upon me by my lady's favourite lost none of its pristine power; indeed, if possible, I disliked the gentleman more than ever. I know he harmed my reputation with my haughty mistress considerably, by telling her a most abominable falsehood. He had the audacity to say that I kissed the

servant-maids, and that when the gentlefolks were in bed I crept down into the kitchen, and there made merry with the menials, and drank and laughed with them.

This scandal incensed my mistress exceedingly, and especially being entirely innocent of the charges laid against my door, "I was hypocritical enough to look sanctified, and shocked at other people's want of modesty," when I failed in that very respect myself. So my lord gave me to understand one evening as I sat translating some French verses into English prose for his kinswoman.

"Now, Steyneville," he said, sitting down by me with a smile, "I have come on no pleasant mission. O, you wicked young dog, so young, and so—fie, fie—" shaking his forefinger at me.

Naturally not knowing why he addressed me in these terms, I looked as others would have looked, under the circumstances, mystified.

"Come, that won't do, Mr. Innocent," cried my lord, rather sternly. "You know very well what I mean—Betty and Sue, kissing, &c."

“My lord,” I exclaimed, springing from my seat, not knowing what to make of his last words, “indeed I do not know to what you allude. I—indeed—” My speech failed, but my unfeigned look of astonishment amply served me. No guilty person could have expressed such sincere wonderment in being impeached of a sin which had never been committed as I.

“Well,” said my lord, considerably puzzled, “I don’t know what to make of the affair. Someone told my lady that you had been embracing the opportunity to embrace—her servants,” he said, slyly. “In fact, that you had been carousing with them, and behaving altogether in a manner extremely discreditable to my recommendation and to my cousin’s taste.”

“My lord!” cried I, boiling with rage at the unfounded accusation, “I swear it is a lie; I know nothing of the matter, and am entirely innocent. Let me face the person who thus slanders the son of my father, and I will make him eat his words—by Heaven, I will.”

Now I come to consider the matter in a

more philosophical light, I think these were bold words for a lad of thirteen.

“Bravo, Harold!” said my lord. “I knew, I thought it couldn’t be true from the first, and I will be very glad to vindicate your character to my lady.”

In my hour of adversity, I was so pleased to find that he, at least, had believed in my honour, that, in my gratitude, I knelt and kissed his hand.

“Stay,” said he; “before I find my kinswoman, tell me if you know anyone who bears you any malice, who would fabricate the story to injure you?”

I shook my head sorrowfully. I had done no one any harm, so who would take a pleasure in injuring the name of a lad—a mere lad?

“Think,” said Lord Halifax. “Ponder well. Is there no one whom you think capable of so despicable an act—none? Come, don’t be afraid to tell me,” as I hesitated. “If you are wrong none shall know. Is it l’Abbé Chatronière, my lady’s chaplain?”

“O, no; he has been very kind to me,” I

answered hastily, afraid to mention the name of the man whom I really thought guilty.

“Colonel Death?” he suggested.

“Nay, indeed I like him very much. I know he would not harm me,” I cried, “for he has been very good to me.”

“Who then?”

“My lord, since you will have me mention the gentleman whom I greatly mistrust, through no reason whatever, only that I know he dislikes me—”

“To what does all this lead?—out with it,” exclaimed my lord, impatiently. “His name?”

“M. de la Motte,” I returned, trembling with apprehension.

“Humph,” answered my lord, with a start. “Very queer; but it is the gentleman who maligned you to my lady, and what’s more, I don’t trust the dark-eyed fellow myself; there smacks much of the spy in him. A close, deep villain. Have you ever remarked him scenting about the place, as if in search, like a hound on the track, eh?”

It was my turn to start now. I had often seen him peering about the study in which I

worked, opening the drawers, tapping the strong boxes that contained musty documents and papers of the Norton family. But I had never thought anything of the fact till now. Now that my benefactor had mentioned the word "spy," it occurred to me M. de la Motte was very like one, or I was much mistaken.

"Now listen, Steyneville," said my lord, impressively, when I had communicated the fact to him. "I believe, I know I can rely on your secrecy and intelligence —"

I bowed to the first, and blushed for the second.

"I have cause to consider this man, de la Motte, an unprincipled adventurer—a man who would not scruple to gain secrets and sell them afterwards," he pursued. "Now, I want you to watch him carefully. If he is an emissary of the Government, a paid spy, his actions must betray him at last, and, if they do, it will fare badly with him, I warrant. Those strong boxes that you mention contain valuable papers. If they are found by enemies my Lady Norton will suffer."

“Are they treasonable, then?” I asked, breathlessly.

“Tush. I, that have no cause or king, or queen either, for the matter of that, know nothing of what you call treasonable. Whether they place a monkey or a puppet on the throne matters little to me. But not so to the lady you serve; she is a Jacobite, and upholds the true cause”—all this was said very sneeringly—“but, Jacobite or no Jacobite, cause or no cause, it is my duty to see that her life and honour are not placed in jeopardy, and, if they are, to do my best to rescue them, as her kinsman and friend. Do you understand?” he asked, breaking off abruptly, and fixing his searching eyes on me.

“Yes, my lord. Am I,” I added, with a heightened colour, “to be a spy over M. de la Motte because he is one?”

“Steyneville, Saint Steyneville,” said my lord, laughing and yawning lazily, “what a glorious specimen of an earthly angel thou art! By-the-bye, I am not so sure,” bantering with his light, easy manner, “that I don’t see a halo at the back of thee, as it is. Step

a little away, for mercy's sake ; the light is too dazzling ! ”

“ My lord,” I answered, in a low voice, “ you have told me to watch M. de la Motte — ”

“ And I decidedly wish you would,” interposed Lord Alingdale, “ for many reasons. Firstly you are the only one I would trust ; secondly — ”

“ Pardon me, my lord,” I interrupted, with a low bow, “ that reason is sufficient. I will endeavour to be worthy of that trust you honour me with.”

“ Spoken like a brave lad,” he exclaimed, clapping me on the shoulder — “ like the lad I took thee for ; if,” he continued, and his gay manner left him as he became wonderfully earnest, “ if thy conscience hath scruples in doing what I ask of you, remember this, that there is many a falsehood uttered which the heaven thou believest in loveth often more than the cold truth. Thou understandest me, I see ; for the present I will say nothing to my lady of de la Motte's treachery. Words will avail nothing with her. She must have proofs, and she shall.”

There was a light tap at the door, and the head of Colonel Death popped in.

“ Hallo Alingdale, I’ve been racing all over the place for you,” he began.

“ Now you have found me, Death, what on earth do you want?” said my lord, rather angry with the interruption.

“ Damme, but that’s a very friendly welcome, I must confess.”

“ Oui, oui, vous avez quelque chose à confesser,” said another voice outside, proceeding evidently from the fat, good-tempered little Abbé Chatronière. “ Vat is it? vat is it?” he said, hurrying into the room in a violent perspiration, occasioned by the exercise of ascending one flight of stairs. “ Is it you, Colonel, that has done some things wrong that your conscience cannot support; vite, my infant, I will hear you, en bas, and then you can go to dinner with a vite mind.”

“ And an empty stomach,” added my lord. “ There, Death, can you resist the father’s temptation?”

“ Ah, moqueur!” cried the Abbé, “ are you changing also our young friend into a

giour like yourself. Heed him not, c'est un precepteur very bad, milore Alingdale," he added, turning to me.

" Still, though he believes not, he is alive, M. l'Abbé," answered my lord, half bitterly.

" Ah, that goes not well; for it is natural that a man must *exist* to believe in nothing!"

" And when he has ceased to exist," inquired my lord, jestingly, " I suppose he believes ' pour sur ? ' "

" Then he believes," answered the Abbé, reverently crossing himself.

" He begins to believe when he is dead, eh ? " asked my lord, cynically.

" Yes, for man is a spirit covered by flesh, and the spirit lives when the flesh is gone and dead. The spirit lives for ever, and then, dans les regions de—in one of the regions of the two other worlds into which his spirit flees, he must believe in that which, when his flesh lived, he scorned, mais, je vent dire—but I cannot explain to you in your hard, hard tongue, that which I could render so facile to your understanding in my own sweet language," he said, rather helplessly.

" So" answered my lord, lightly—" I am to

understand by your argument, Abbé, that a man hath but one suit of clothes—flesh, I mean—ask a million pardons—and when that has worn out, Nature—O, what an unkindly tailor she is!—refuses under any condition to give him a new—”

“ *Mon Dieu!* ” cried the Abbé, raising his eyes to the ceiling, and clasping his fat little paws, “ be still, be tranquil, milore, and go away with *M. le Colonel*, and drink, eat, sleep, shout; do anything but dispute upon a grave sujet avec tant de levitée.”

O, what a funny little creature that Abbé was! After dinner, with all his preaching, he was as tipsy as any of the younger and more secular spirits!

“ Now Abbé,” interposed Colonel Death, confidentially, “ what is your opinion of a man who hasn’t a religion? ”

“ *Vat* would be yours, as a soldier, *M. le Colonel*,” asked the staunch Abbé, “ of a beautiful city which hath no inhabitants? ”

“ Ah! that question requires consideration,” answered the Colonel, musingly.

“ And so does yours, my Colonel,” returned the divine, promptly.

I have forgotten to mention that the good Abbé was kind enough to give me lessons in Latin for an hour every day, and as I had not yet received my hour that day he lost no time in clearing the two gentlemen out of the room to give me my time, for the dinner bell would soon ring, and M. l'Abbé liked to do his duty, so he could eat his fill without any twinges in his innocent conscience.

Three-quarters soon passed, and the loud gong began to sound fifteen minutes to the dinner hour.

The Abbé rose from the desk. As he did so I remembered, with a kind of despair, that I had not finished the translation given to me by my mistress for the following day. I could not take the magnificently bound volume away with me, and if I did not have the work ready for the next morning she would doubtless believe I had been neglectful and idle. The Abbé noticed my look of misery, and asked me the cause. Having informed him the reason of my downcast countenance, he said —

“ What matters that? *Après le dinner* you can mount and finish your work, and all will

be well. Dame ! mon garçon, la tristesse becomes thee not."

"Ah, no!" I answered in French. "My lady will miss me. The truth will come out, and I shall be undone. What shall I do?"

"Do!" repeated the divine, rather testily, "do—do what I tell thee. After dinner thou mountest into this apartment with tranquillity. I will make thy excuses if any are needed; but tiens, there are none necessary. To-night is le grand jeu card playing, and all will be so bent on the play that none shall notice thy absence. Here," he continued, pointing to a small recess, "if anyone chances to enter they cannot perceive thee unless of course they search, which they will not."

Having joyfully thanked the Abbé for his good counsel we separated to dress, and what came of my night work I think deserves a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER X.

THE dinner was at an end. And the gentlemen, left to themselves, in the absence of the fairer sex, sought consolation for their loss in the bottle. Judging by the quantity of wine they imbibed I think their grief must have been very, very great. There was a greater number than usual assembled around the board that night, since, as the Abbé had told me, it was the evening of the “grand-jeu,” when the guests played cards often till five and six o’clock in the morning. This card-festival was held once a month; many who came to the castle comparatively poor went away rich, and *vice-versâ*, many who came rich went away poor. I have seen a gentleman play for his shoe buckles, his ruffles, and

the *very wig upon* his head. They carried their enthusiasm for gaming to a high pitch. I was uneasy; I wished to be gone, and I could find no opportunity as yet. My lord was lounging with his chair against the door, and as the whole affair was of so trivial a nature I did not wish to trouble him with it; besides, I know he would have commanded me to stop, saying he would arrange it with my lady about my not having performed my duties if I had told him, and so I was firmly resolved not to acquaint him of the matter. But how to escape as yet it was impracticable, so awaiting any chance to present itself I listened to the conversation. It was about love-letters, and not of a very enlightening nature.

“I declare, upon my oath,” said a beau of some nineteen summers, in light blue, “that I have received, from some fair creatures, O, innumerable billets which I wouldn’t even take the trouble to answer. Curse me—a man (?) would have a deal to do.”

“Ha—ha—ha!” roared the outright Colonel Death, immensely tickled. “I sincerely beg pardon; go on, pray.”

But the anecdote was lost to some of the youth's listening admirers, who glanced up angry, discomfited, and defeated.

“ Jupiter Olympus ! ” exclaimed another exquisite. “ Speaking about billets, come to my rooms ; I’ve a neat little boudoir completely papered with ‘em ! ”

It is a positive fact that all young gentlemen boast of their powers of enchanting, be they ever so stupid or ugly, they all have their *Veni, Vedi, Vici* affairs !

“ Bah,” cried a third, unwilling to be outdone by the last speaker, “ I receive so many, that I have scarcely time to read them all—here are some,” he said, tossing a packet on the table, “ that my villain slipped into my hand as I came from my place.”

They were pounced upon by several eager hands and eyes, whose owners were ready to sneer and laugh over the lines that perhaps some good, loving woman had penned.

“ To tell the honest truth,” quoth a fourth supercilious-looking fellow —

The Colonel trod on my foot, under cover of the table. It might have been inadvertently, for, when I looked at him, he was

paying, or seeming to pay, the greatest possible attention to the speaker.

“I never take a man” (he meant valet) “unless he has an exquisite sense of smell!”—

“Ma foi, c'est bien extraordinaire,” ejaculated the Abbé Chatronière, “why?”

“Because,” returned the ladies’ heart-breaker, “I am so right down sick of billets-doux, that I never wish to see any of them.”

“I do not see that very clear, sir,” remarks the little divine, with a puzzled expression. “What has the nose of your valet-de-chambre to do with ladies’ letters?

“Everything,” returned the other, complacently. “Do you not know, Abbé, that the charming creatures *always* scent their notes, and my man sniffing from whence they come either keeps or burns them!”

“Ah, monsieur,” cried the Abbé, “one day you will get much of annoyances through affairs like these. Take care, I warn you.”

“Thank you, Abbé,” said the gentleman, politely, “I will.”

“This is too good,” roared a dandy of some fifty winters, perusing one of the

billets-doux. "Just listen to this," and he read as follows:—

“ ‘ I cannot bear the suspense any longer. It is now three long weeks since I have seen you. . . . You are breaking my heart. My heart, do I say ; it is false, I have no heart of my own, for that which I once possessed is now entirely yours. Oh, if you cannot love me any more, give me back that which you have taken, and yet how dare I write it ! . . . I would rather that you still keep it, and give me yours instead ; you vowed I had it once— ah, that dear, dear *once*, will it ever come back again ? I cannot tell you how much it has cost me to write this confession ; but that my parents wish me to *marry* someone of their choice—fancy ! when you have possession of my very soul. Come back then, come back to your heartbroken

“ CAROLINE.”

This was the substance of the missive, written on delicate gilt-edged paper, with a coronet stamped on the outside. Its perusal was greeted with considerable applause and laughter.

“ Death,” cried my lord, suddenly, “ what was the note I saw handed to you this morning, over which you blushed as rosy as—give me a simile, one of you fellows.”

“ An Eastern morn ?” hazarded one.

“ A moss-rose ?” asked another.

“ A pickled cabbage?” cried a witling.

“ All far too common and ordinary,” responded my lord.

“ Never mind the simile, let the simile go to the d—l, Alingdale,” screamed a high prelate of the Romish Church, seated at the head of the table ; “ tell us the matter that the note contained.”

“ The very thing I wish to know myself. I was asking a question, may it please your lordship, not stating a fact ” returned the other calmly, “ but to return to the simile, I have hit upon one myself, ‘ Death blushed as red as a cardinal’s hat ’ and the hat being the simile, it will go to the devil — when its owner takes it there.”

My lord then sate down with a most unconcerned expression on his face, and the cardinal remained thoughtful and silent for the rest of the evening.

Whilst every ear and eye had centred its attention on the two speakers, I noticed that one of the gentlemen, he who had given “pickled cabbage” for a simile, had stolen stealthily from his chair, behind that of Colonel Death’s, and deftly took his letter case from out his pocket. Having accomplished this feat of dexterity, he betook himself to his seat again, and was soon absorbed in the contents of his theft.

Presently he cried out, waving a piece of paper, “I have it ! I have it !”

“Have what ?” asked M. de la Motte, who had made me very uncomfortable by staring at me with his bold, evil eyes.

“The letter that Death received this morning, that Alingdale spoke about.”

The Colonel turned pale, and clapped his hands to his pockets.

“Ay, it is dated to-day,” continued the other, “and please hold him while I read it, or he’ll throttle me.”

“Nay, nay, that’s not fair,” began the Colonel.

“All is fair in love and war,” said Lord Alingdale ; “begin, Arbuckle.”

This was James Arbuckle, the poet, commonly called "Jim." He read as follows :—

" HONOURED SIE,—May the blessings of an Almighty God ever shouer upon you the happiness you deserve, is the prayer of your humble sarvent. Arter I had given some of that beautiful wine and a little meat, as the vicar says they must'nt ha' too much at first, to my darter she was much, much better, and fell asleep and awoke agen this blissed mornin' as frash and lively as I dun knoe what.

" My harte is so full of thankfulness and joy that my poor words can't say, no, not one half that they would. The mony you sent, dear gentleman, will make us now happy and comfortabel. I can't see to write no more, my mind be far to full, and my een too waterie' to permit of me saying all.

" Again entreatin' a blessin' from Him, for you who was so good to the widerwed and fatherless, I remain your obedient, obliged, and humble sarvent,

" SOPHY BAILEY."

“There, gentlemen,” cried “Jim,” as he finished the epistle, there sits

‘The humble Death, who with an awkward shame,
Does good by stealth, and blushes to find it fame.’

And with due respect to Mr. Pope, and an unfeigned sorrow to put his sweet lines out of metre, I beg to propose the health of Death, and long life to him, an honour to his country and to humanity. Hip, hip, hurrah ! ”

And amid the general hubbub and excitement that followed the toast, I managed to make my escape.

Once in the library, I placed my writing materials on the desk, in the recess that the Abbé had pointed out to me, and which was screened from view by a heavy curtain, trimmed my lamp, and sat down to commence work. But somehow or other my mind, in spite of me, would revert to other things. Twice I caught myself writing some wholly extraneous matter than that which I had in hand. In despair I laid down my pen for a minute and buried my face in my hands. I could not help cogitating over Colonel Death and his letter, M.

de la Motte, my lady, and lastly—but not least—my home and my father. My meditations did not tend to calm or lessen my emotions by any means; on the contrary, they rather seemed to grow and increase. My feelings were decidedly of a mixed kind. I could not tell which predominated. Anger and hate against de la Motte for his treachery, love and sorrow for my dear home, or admiration for Colonel Death. As these powers were battling against each other for victory within me, I heard a footstep near the door, and the handle turned. Without another moment's thought I blew out the light, and awaited with breathless anxiety for the result.

“Somebody coming for a book,” thought I.

The door opened cautiously, and a man entered with a candle. As he held it up to look about I recognized the face—M. de la Motte. He was very pale, and his features looked haggard and worn. I could see that very well, even though I could not venture more than a peep from my recess. He had been playing—and losing.

“Curse it,” said he, setting the light upon the table.

“ Curse it! Always my luck. Playing with a clear head and with skill against a set of drunken fools, I lose. I wish that the money would turn to red-hot living coals in their pockets, and burn them to cinders. I wish— Bah, shall I trouble about *un jeu de carte*, when I have such a great game in hand? Camille de la Motte, thou art an idiot thyself, far greater than either of those sottish Englishmen downstairs, if thou heedest such a loss. A future is before thee; thou hast gained the—well, love of that English tigress, Miladi Norton; thou hast gained her confidence. She is a Jacobite, and hath papers of much value hidden somewhere—papers for which the English Government pay well, and then—money, flight, and pleasure. Aha!” he continued, with a sardonic look, “ who would recognise in M. de la Motte the now accomplished, the fine gentleman, the former destitute outcast of Paris? Who would believe that he, a virtuoso, a connoisseur in all matters of fine art, but a few short years ago was a ragged and dirty urchin in France? None would credit it—and I myself least of

all! ‘C'est n'est que l'audace, qui trouve la place’—in this world at least everything else may go to the wall but audacity—yes, audacity and impudence will make the very sun wink. Ah! Camille, Camille, but a little more acting and thou will be opulent; and what though thy wealth be gained by a little treachery—treachery, pshaw! What is it that pink of honour, that devil of a Lord Alingdale, said to-night—‘All is fair in love and war.’ So be it. And I am an honest man. A quarter to eleven,” he said, consulting the timepiece, “and she will be here in fifteen minutes. She will meet her true love in the library, her Camille, ‘My Olympia.’ Pah! With all her esprit and genius she, too, is but a vain fool, or how can she believe that I love one untamed and wild as she is? But soft, my friend, thou must calm thyself; thou art not fit to play the fond adorer in this mood. Yes,” looking in the mirror, “that wan, haggard countenance is good, it seemeth as if thou wert labouring under the burden of love unrequited. Very good indeed, very good. I have her love, but if I obtain her

pity ; if, again if, I know she will pity me, and then I will tell her my sorrows, and she will tell me hers. Ay, we will mutually confide, and—" He gave vent to a laugh that absolutely made me shudder with horror.

Presently, a few minutes after the clock had struck eleven, my lady entered. M. de la Motte took her hand with a great show of respect, and kissed it.

" Ah ! " he said, " late, and I have been waiting so long for you ; the very minutes seemed like years."

" A truce to compliments," answered my lady, smiling nevertheless.

" A truce to them if you will, Madame," he returned with such well-feigned sadness in his tones that I no longer wondered that my lady believed him. " A truce to them, since I pay no flattery, but my looks, surely they cannot lie, they —"

" Stay," she cried earnestly, " whose fault is it that you are so strangely altered—for altered you are ? "

" Whose fault ? " asked the other in mournful accents. " You ask me ? Ah ! mon Dieu, have pity," he cried, sinking on

his knee, and seizing no unwilling hand and pressing his lips passionately upon it.

She did not attempt to withdraw or repulse him, this strange woman, but looked on the dark head bent over her hand half-passionately and half-proudly.

“ You say no word ? ” he asked, looking up. “ Ah ! cruel, cruel.”

“ What would you have me say ? ” she answered softly.

“ Camille, I love you.”

“ Camille,” returned my lady unhesitatingly, placing her hands on his shoulders, and gazing straight into his eyes, “ Camille, I adore you.”

“ And trust — ”

“ You implicitly ? Yes.”

“ Thanks, thanks ; many thanks. I knew it,” said the spy, with a joy he could not disguise. “ What happiness,” cried he, as if in transport, “ to be loved by such a woman ; but tell me, have you never loved before, my Olympia ? ”

“ Never once, through all the years of my life, and I am thirty. You see I do not even disguise my age from you, though all think I

am considerably younger. I have never loved before now, and now —”

“And now?” he repeated, as if waiting with breathless anxiety for an answer.

“And now,” she continued, “I who never dreamed myself capable of any fond passion in common with my sex, feel, know how much, how greatly I have erred. Ah! my Camille, I, whom the world thinks cold, haughty, and proud, thou canst tell another tale. Is it not so? Where, where is the pride of Olympia Norton now?” cried the poor woman with such passionate earnestness that the tears started down my cheeks. “Where is it? It hath gone, and left in its stead —”

“An undying love,” said the spy, half afraid, I thought, of my lady’s devotion.

“You say so,” she answered, “Camille, and I believe you.”

“But tell me, my own,” he asked presently, after he had made a long speech about his passion, and which is too prolix to recapitulate, “is there no thing, person, or *cause* which or whom you wish to love, serve as you —”

She started from the encircling arm, and looked fixedly at him.

“Ah, Madame!” exclaimed the Chevalier d’industrie, with a slight irony, “and so this, this is how you trust me? Ma foi!” with a sneering laugh, “the French ladies trust very differently.”

“But I am half French,” answered the dupe; “my mother was French, and I love France, and my prince is in that country! There, you see,” she continued in a colder tone, piqued by his sarcasm, “my confidence in you is unimpaired, since I have confessed so much.”

“So much! my Olympia,” said the other, tenderly; “so little! For could I serve that cause I should deem myself more worthy of your love. But I cannot. I have no power to do so, even though I would. It must be said,” added the traitor, acting a splendid animation, “that a nobody won the peerless Olympia Norton, with nothing; that—”

“Hush,” cried my lady, rising and pacing the room with a hurried step, her vanity and ambition both aroused by the wily Frenchman’s speech.

It was true what he said. He was a nobody, a nothing. No, the woman whose work was to pull down one throne, and raise another in its place, must not descend so low as to— Again no. He had touched her pride to the quick. She would give him an opportunity to distinguish his name from obscurity—together they would share the sweets and honour of a noble labour. All this was written on her working countenance—fatally clear. And the adventurer knew he had won the game.

She then informed him of the whole revolutionary scheme. That the young Pretender was waiting in readiness to embark from the French coast when the signal should come acquainting him of the people's willingness to receive him as their king. And that she possessed papers signed by many unsuspected partisans of the true cause, at the head of which party she was. These documents, she told him in conclusion, would, if found, naturally place in great jeopardy those malcontents who had inscribed their names to a paper in support of so wild a project.

“And where, ma mie, do you keep those precious papers?” he asked.

“In this room; in yonder iron box, on the top of the bookcase,” she answered, whisperingly. “But I must return now, or they will miss me. We can go to the end of the passage together, and then separate.”

Having arranged another interview for the next evening, in the same place, my mistress and M. de la Motte went out together.

About ten minutes after, the figure of a lad with a pale visage might have been seen hurrying down the corridors, past the grand salon, where the ladies and gentlemen were bent on their cards. This was myself.

CHAPTER XI.

THE next day I lost no time in acquainting my protector, Lord Alingdale, of that which I had heard and seen on the preceding night in the library. Although he viewed the whole of the transactions in a grave light, I think he was not altogether unprepared for the discovery of de la Motte's treachery, having suspected that person from the first. That which troubled him most was this : he knew not how to convince his kinswoman of the truth.

“ If we could but seize him red-handed,” said he, musingly. “ It would be the only way, I am sorely afraid, of bringing my lady to her senses.”

“ But,” said I, “ my lady must believe you, my lord, since—”

“ Since, since what ? ” returned Lord Alingdale, shrugging his shoulders. “ Since Eve ate the apple that she was told not to, I suppose, eh ? Bah ! Thou art a good lad, and a clever one, but thou knowest very little of women’s ways if thou think’st that my lady will credit our tale without any stronger evidence against her lover than words.”

I held my peace for a few minutes. How differently, thought I, does my lord think of women to my father. The one who has *been deceived* still holds them in veneration and love; the one who *has* deceived looks upon them as things formed but to beguile a wanton hour.

The Abbé Chatronière had said, “ That a man without a religion was like a beautiful city without an inhabitant.” Very true. But how can love, veneration, and belief inhabit a man who has never seen either of these before him ? My lord’s parents had died in his infancy, and he, left to the charge of mercenary relatives, had grown from childhood to manhood unloved, untrusting, and *beliefless*.

“Affection! Speak of affection to one who has passed his young life amongst grasping, hardened men and women! Veneration, to one who has seen nothing but hypocrisy—whose very preceptors have paved the path to unbelief, and whilst in the search for truth, out-reason and out-argue the very bases and foundations of ‘religion!’ Belief, to one who has grown up amidst those admired and eulogised by the world—with a thorough perception and knowledge that they on whom were bestowed such liberal encomiums and applause were often infinitely baser clay than the very multitude who worshipped them! ”

Thus said my lord bitterly to me one day, long after, when I remonstrated with him after he had read me a portion of a scathing lampoon he had just written relating to some much-debated and discussed Church grievance. This pamphlet breathed a spirit of irreverence and mockery, a total want of any sentiment but that of impiety, yet withal every point was so logically, and soundly, and incontestably reasoned out in support of his own theory that many would have

been unquestionably carried away by his specious argument, only that my remonstrance had the desired effect. He never published it, and the manuscript is now amongst my most prized possessions. Not that I value it for its ingenuity, but because it was written by a dear hand.

Colonel Death expressed his opinion on the pamphlet briefly, but conclusively. With a pursing of the lips, an action which usually expressed a hidden desire to be considered uncommonly impressive, he said—

“ Mind, Alingdale, whatever you say to the contrary, I will never believe this to be your own work.”

“ Who should help me? ” asked the other, with a good-humoured laugh.

“ The same gentleman at whose head Dr. Martin Luther threw an inkstand,” returned the Colonel. “ So you see, I cannot give you with justice the full amount of censure you would deserve *had* you written this entirely yourself.”

But to return where I left off. At last a plan was hit upon. It was arranged that my lord should apprise my mistress of the

danger in which she stood, and if she would not credit his assertions regarding the baseness of the man she had chosen for a lover, he would endeavour to take hold of the upstart in the act of filching the papers, and bring him before her, covered with guilty confusion. It was further agreed that my lord should, from the recess where I had hidden, watch the meeting of the two that night.

* * * * *

It was about two o'clock in the morning, and the inhabitants of Norton Castle were in their respective rooms, and judging by the all-pervading peace and silence, they were also asleep. It was an intolerably warm July ; the heat being so excessive that I could not sleep, but lay on my bed tossing restlessly from side to side. I had not even undressed, but had thrown myself down as I was, "in utter weariness of mind, and in total forgetfulness." At last, unable to bear any longer the combined torture of sleeplessness and trouble, I rose, opened the window and looked out on the scene which lay, in all

its tranquil and solemn beauty, before my eyes.

How still, how very still it was! The giant trees, motionless and undisturbed, threw ghost-like shadows on the green sward, and not a breath of wind stirred their thick foliage. Not a sound. Not even the tiniest hum of an insect voice, not the chirp of a bird, not the flutter of a leaf disturbed that absolute hush. The broad lake, with its surface unruffled and placid as a mirror, stretched beneath; the waning moon's dimmed silver was now bright, now dark— occasioned by the light clouds which ever and anon obscured the heavenly light like a fair woman's face hidden by a veil.

In the distance, beyond, and above the boundaries of the park which surrounded the castle, could already be discerned the first faint streaks of approaching day. Day: when the slumbering earth should again be wakened to another period of pleasure, indifference, or grief. Day: when some would rise from a sleep or vigil of woe and pain, and regret that they yet lived to see the light of morning again. Day: when

others would rise from a refreshing rest, and thank with fervent souls and voices Him who had granted them yet more time in which to love and admire His mighty creations.

I felt lonely and downcast before, but now, as I looked up and marked in the stars and clouds the sublimity and grandeur of His work, my heart felt elevated; and I know not why, but a feeling of gratitude was uppermost in my heart, and I felt better for it—like the dreamy boy that I was. Then a thrill came over me, a thrill of pity for myself, as I reflected what a puny and weak creature I was compared to greater works. Who was I to feel conscious of exaltation in viewing the majestic and gigantic productions of God and Nature? Nobody, nothing, and my heart again sank within me, and I wept bitter tears.

And so I mourned silently, and would not be comforted, after the manner of the Israelitish woman.

Presently, as my tears abated, I heard a sound as of someone treading stealthily on the gravel walk beneath. Drying the last water-

drop from my right eyelid, I peeped cautiously out of the window to ascertain the truth. Yes, by the light of the moon, and to my great astonishment, I saw a man pace impatiently up and down, as if awaiting somebody's arrival. Who could it be promenading about the grounds at that ungodly hour? Not a gallant waiting for his lady-love, surely? No. If I could but see his face! But it was hidden from view by an enormous hat, and his form was shrouded in the folds of a large cloak.

Before my mind had time to conjecture anything more feasible than a robbery being meditated, in legal language, by some person or persons unknown, the mysterious figure said, under his breath—

“Sapristi! comme ils sont tard!”

M. de la Motte! Without a doubt. If my window had not been so near to the ground I would not have heard him, but, fortunately, it happened that I was only about fifteen feet from the gravel walk, so that in case of necessity I could take a bold leap.

Presently, ere my astonishment had subsided in some degree, I saw five men advance

cautiously towards him, upon which they all turned, and disappeared behind a summer-house that stood a little distance beyond the lake.

What did they want? what should I do? Situated thus, and well knowing that it was for no good purpose that this spy and these men assembled together, I think others would have done what I did, viz., throw fear aside, and without another thought as to the consequences, spring from the window and follow them.

And so I leaped, falling on the gravel rather more heavily than I cared. For my poor knees and hands were dreadfully cut by the rough stones, and bled profusely. But in my wild excitement at the time I heeded nothing but to gain the object I had in view—to hear if I could for what end the spy and his men had assembled. Rising from the ground, and careless of the sharp pain which the fall had occasioned, I stealthily trod over the green, taking heed to keep well in the shadows of the friendly trees, until I reached a spot, dangerously near, where I heard as follows :—

De la Motte (who, surrounded by the five men, all standing) was speaking in his broken English. "I tell you, Mon Capitaine, that all are asleep in the castle, and that there is no cause to fear someone overhears ; no, my faith, none."

The one addressed as Capitaine—"Well, well, have you the proofs of Lady Norton's treasonous adherence to the Pretender's cause ?"

De la Motte—"Ma foi ! You go too quick; not yet, but I will tell you ; *to-morrow* she will show to me the papers signed by the malcontents — *to-morrow* evening, in that apartment which is so near to the entrance door."

The "Capitaine," impatiently—"The entrance door be hanged ! Be good enough to stick to facts, and tell us plainly —"

De la Motte (contemptuously)—"Plainly, bon Dieu ! Listen, I have gained my lady's love, and trust —"

The "Capitaine"—"Like the villain you are ; by Jove, couldn't you have obtained the documents without ? Pah, you disgust me !" and he spat upon the ground.

De la Motte (suavely)—“Pardon me. In love and war all is fair; but I will give you no sermons, but advice. To-morrow evening at eight o'clock I have a rendezvous with the fair Englishwoman in the library. I will take care to have the window open, as it is warm, very warm weather, is it not? Very well. We begin to speak first of love and then politics, and she takes down the iron box to show me the papers. Then I go near the window and fan myself with my handkerchief and say, ‘Eureka, *how hot it is!*’ Then you enter the apartment, and in the name of the Gracious Queen whom I am so pleased to serve, arrest the beautiful Jacobite and take her and her documents away.”

The “Capitaine”—“Be it so. But of all the scoundrelly spies I have ever had to do with, take it as a compliment or not, you are the worst. I only wish it had not fallen to my lot to have anything to do with you.”

De la Motte (sardonically)—“Ah, the poor lamb! the poor Capitaine, he who blanches not before the steel of the enemy, nor his fire, shrinks in his duty to his Queen.”

The Captain—“If any but you had said

that, his carcase would stretch its length on the earth ; but *you*, a spy ! My sword which has been stained by the blood of so many noble men would be dishonoured in making the hole in your vile body that should let daylight enter ! But that's enough. I understand that you are to see the proofs tomorrow evening at eight o'clock ; I, and Adamson here, alone shall attend. We will wait outside till we hear the signal, 'Eureka' when we will enter and take possession of the documents and the lady. That is all, I think."

De la Motte (mocking)—"Your powers, my Capitaine, of *thinking* are really too wonderful, for, unlike the thoughts of common, vulgar minds, they are quite right in every respect."

The Captain—"There is nothing more that detains us, then ?"

De la Motte—"Absolutely nothing, unless—"

The Captain—"Unless what ?"

De la Motte—"Unless your English and sublimely poetic sensibilities wish to meet with a congenial spirit which could assist you

in admiring the wonders of Nature on such a night or morning as this. Look up, my friend, look into those mighty heavens, where the moon and stars are rapidly fading—giving way to the greater power of day. Is not that a sight which touches your soul more than the sorrows of a weak human thing? Look down, my friend, upon the marvellous beauties which surround you all wrapped in slumbering silence. Yes, sleep's death-like silence! Within this little spot where we now stand the world is contained, the World—Life and Death. We are the living; yonder castle with its sleeping inmates the dead. Does not your Shakespeare, your divine Shakespeare, say that sleep is Death's counterfeit? But I speak like a fool, I forget myself entirely. In these sceptical days we have lost the admiration for Nature that our ancestors possessed! We have," he added, in concluding his speech, "degenerated certainly."

Strange that this man, scoundrel as he was, was really an enthusiastic admirer of the beauties of Nature.

The Captain looked at the spy wonder-

ingly. His apparent sincerity on this one point amazed him not a little, and he repeated almost mechanically, as if in echo to his last words, "We have degenerated certainly."

"And will still more," returned de la Motte. "But that is neither here nor there. What was I about to say? Ah, yes, I remember now. There is nothing more to detain us? No? Very good. Adieu, au revoir; sweet dreams, gentlemen," and he raised his hat and bowed in a courtly manner to the Captain and his men, who neither returned the salute nor answered, but went away as mysteriously as they came.

I crouched down as the spy passed very close to me, but I feared nothing. In my excited state I would have dared the man, but on calmer reflection I knew I could not serve my lady thus.

"Those English dogs," he muttered to himself, between his clenched teeth, "have no manners, no politeness of any kind. The brutes, the uncultivated beasts, how gladly I would kill them—all."

I waited breathlessly for about ten minutes

in my uncomfortable position, and then looked around to ascertain if he were gone. He had—a mercy for which I thanked Heaven, for I was weak and exhausted, occasioned by the loss of blood proceeding from the injuries I had sustained in leaping from the window.

I rose cautiously, and knowing a ladder to be in the summer-house, fetched it out and ascended with its help into my room again. This was extremely fortunate, or else my nocturnal, or rather diurnal adventure, might have ended far more disagreeably and unpleasantly than it did. I mean I would have had ample time (supposing, of course, I had not found the ladder) and leisure on the hard ground to reflect on the folly of taking a step which could not be retraced.

CHAPTER XII.

THE time was eight o'clock p.m.; the scene, the library of Norton Castle; the *dramatis personæ* discovered: My Lady and de la Motte; the *dramatis personæ* *undiscovered*, Lord Alingdale and myself. We were both hidden in the recess, waiting for that which was impending. I had informed him of the event which had taken place on the previous morning in the park, and he had taken precautions to avoid the catastrophe which threatened his kinswoman by an ingenious stratagem. My lady had contemptuously expressed her disbelief of de la Motte's treachery, when told of it by my lord, and declared the whole to be a scandalous fabrication. "Love is blind" verily. My lord

had avoided to acquaint her of my discovery of the preceding morning, to punish my lady for her obstinacy in discrediting the first warning he gave her of her lover's treason.

My mistress was seated in an arm-chair. The spy by her side held her hand, breathing vows of constancy and love. I, in the recess, was trembling with disgust and rage at the shameful falsehoods uttered by the renegade; my lord, on the contrary, cool and imperturbable, listened to their conversation and de la Motte's vows with a calmness that seemed to me perfectly marvellous. I had not yet learned that tranquillity which is in every respect so essential to the one who is compelled by force of circumstances to enact a trying part.

It is remarkable what minute things obtrude themselves on one's notice during critical moments? The ticking of a clock, the buzzing of a fly, the arrangement of a curtain, a pin on the floor, all impress themselves on the mind as if their very diminutiveness of sound and appearance assist in some measure to increase the influence wrought on the mind by the

object of our chief consideration. And so, apart from the objects which absorbed my powers of pity and indignation, I could not help remarking, wonderingly, too, the face of my mistress. It was so changed, and yet I could not tell what it was that had so altered that countenance, usually bold and self-possessed. Her expression was almost soft, and as she sate looking at the other with eyes that betokened nothing but intense love, I felt doubly incensed at the heartless wretch who occasioned it, and was for springing out of my hiding place immediately, only that my lord, reading my designs, by my working face, frustrated them by holding me back.

“Tenez, ma belle,” cried M. de la Motte, after a while, “did you not promise to show me the signed papers to-night? Though, I must confess,” he added, laughingly, “I am half ashamed—”

“Of what?”

“Of my curiosity; you must not think, although I ask you this favour, that I make love like your cold Englishmen. No, no.”

“Indeed,” returned my lady, with a smile, “I thought there was but one fashion of making love?”

“You,” said the spy, “who are never wrong in your surmises about men and things,” with an irony that my lady did not detect, “err this time. Every country has its different style of making what fools and the wise alike term ‘Love.’ The Englishman goes about it as if in sheer weariness, and as if he had nothing better to do. For example, two people meet, and time hanging heavily on their hands, the gallant says to himself, ‘Ah, voila, a lady; I have nothing to occupy my thoughts; I will make love.’ The lady, on her part, is agreeable, and the two think they have a passion for each other. ‘Tis nothing of the kind. It is simply because they both are ennuyés. In Germany a man marries because he finds a wife much more economical than a hired cook, and darning of old socks. In Spain lovers are as one person; marriage makes them entire strangers. In Italy the women have such a vast amount of love in their compositions that one husband or lover doth not content them. No; they

must have two ; but in France, sweet France— ”

He paused.

“ They love well and truly ? ” hazarded my mistress earnestly, with glistening, eager eyes.

“ Yes, undoubtedly,” said the spy abruptly, rising from his chair ; “ but now, ma mie,” he added, lightly kissing her hand, “ I wish to test your trust in me. You know— ” pointing to the iron strong box which was supposed to contain the treasonous documents.

“ Ah! yes, yes,” returned my lady. “ Do you know, Camille,” placing one of her hands on his shoulder, and looking trustfully into his dark, handsome face, “ I had forgotten all about them. Fancy, Olympia Norton *forgetting*, ” laughingly. “ Such a thing was never heard of ; but you—you are to blame, since you occupy my thoughts and heart. *My heart*, ” she continued, now laying her fair head on the spy’s shoulder, and speaking with ineffable tenderness—“ it is not even mine, for it is all, all yours— ”

“ Yes, yes, I hope—I know,” said the

traitor, uneasily, “but come, dear heart, if you trust me, show it by deeds—deeds!”—he emphasised the word—“not words.”

My lady, with perfect faith in the man by her side, and, assisted by him, ultimately succeeded in placing the iron box on the table. Covered with dust as it was, it seemed as if it had not been touched for a considerable time, and when it was opened the yellow papers lay undisturbed in a large scroll. The spy trembled visibly. My lady, noticing his agitation, asked him the cause. He, in reply, took out his handkerchief and commenced fanning himself.

“Open the window,” said my lady, anxiously. “Shall I ring?”

“No, no,” answered the spy, hastily. “I entreat, as you love me, do not. Are these the papers?” he asked, pointing to them.

“Yes,” replied my lady, hesitatingly.

“Are you certain?” said the spy, regaining his composure as he saw the alarmed look of his mistress. He was satisfied on one point, viz., that her anxiety only sprang from regard for him. Not from doubt—no, not from doubt.

But my lady's fears for his health were not so easily quieted. She opened the window, and taking the documents from the box, refused to allow him to see them until he was quite recovered.

His nerves were unstrung; he was quite, quite pale, she said; her Camille must not, should not exert himself.

He went to the window, damping his forehead with his kerchief. She had placed the scroll of papers on the table, meanwhile examining her lover with the penetrating eyes of devotion, in painful suspense.

"Eureka!" exclaimed he, leaning out of window, "how hot it is!"

This was the given signal; almost immediately after the man—the Captain I had seen the preceding morning in company with another, probably the one he called Adamson, entered the room, closing the door carefully behind them.

My mistress started, and looked from one to the other in speechless amazement. At last she articulated haughtily—

"Who are you? What do you want here?"

“My lady,” replied the Captain civilly, “I am in possession of a warrant for your arrest.”

“My arrest!” she cried, breathlessly, placing both hands upon her heart. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, madam, you are suspected of holding treasonous communications with the other side of the Channel; also for harbouring documents against the peace and welfare of our gracious sovereign and liege Queen Anne. I arrest you in her name. Here are papers,” he added, taking them from the table, “and I regret to say it is my duty to remove you instantly.”

“Good God!” she exclaimed to herself, as if struck by a terrible thought, passing her hand over her forehead hurriedly. “Can it be true, gentlemen?” she said, aloud. “For pity’s sake, for mercy’s sake—”

“Madam,” replied the Captain, bowing, “appeal to our hearts is vain; we dare not listen to any overtures, even if we would.”

“Overtures! I!” cried my lady, disdainfully, drawing herself up to her full height; “you mistake me, gentlemen. No, I ask no

mercy—one dies but once—and if in a good cause, why it is sweet to die; but," she added, with growing alarm, her cynical, contemptuous manner forsaking her, "why do you not speak, Camille? Why do you leave me to deal with these men alone and unaided?"

But the form she addressed stood silent and immovable in its place by the window.

"At least move, hold me out your hand," she said, beseechingly. "Do you not hear, Camille, Camille, my love?" And she stretched out her arms expectingly.

But still the figure in the corner moved not and remained silent.

"Gentlemen!" she cried, turning to the two men, dazed and faltering, "tell me, for the love of Heaven, who my accuser is—but, be careful; I pray you implicate no innocent man, for I could not bear it. Oh, my God, pity, pity!" she prayed brokenly.

"Madam," returned the Captain, pityingly, "why do you wish to know now?"

"Is it not better that I should know now?" returned my lady, with forced calmness. "I can bear it. The Nortons," she

added, as if musing on the weakness she had exhibited, "were not wont to be afraid. No, nor shall one of them play the poltroon *now*. Sir, I wish to know the name of my accuser," she said firmly, "and then I will go with you wherever you choose to lead me."

"Madam, he is there," pointing with the scroll to *the spy*.

A shade passed over the woman's face, but that was all. Her iron strength and power of will bore down all the emotions caused by the intelligence. Her heart might break, but her face, though fearfully pallid, resumed once more its lofty expression. Only the hand that was hanging by her side was clenched tightly,—so tightly that the nails were driven into the soft flesh, causing the blood to flow.

A pause succeeded. Lady Norton had not glanced again at the traitor who still stood motionless in his place by the window. The two soldiers, astonished at the unexpected dignity of character exhibited by the accused, looked mystified, not daring to utter a sound. They had been used to tears, cries for mercy, prayers, execrations and struggles.

Yes, they knew how to deal with those. But with this noble serenity how could they act? The two soldiers' hearts respected and honoured the courage displayed by this delicately nurtured woman. Only the brave know how to value the brave.

“Gentlemen,” said my lady, in her accustomed tones, “it is late, but all I ask of you is a delay of one half-hour longer.”

“Your time, madam, shall be ours,” replied the Captain, bowing.

“Thank you,” she said, bending her head. “I must inform my kinsman of this event, which,” she added bitterly, “he forwarned me of—blind fool that I was. I have guests under this roof who need not be incommoded in any way by my arrest, so I wish that it should take place quietly—that we leave here without the knowledge of anyone save my Lord Alingdale. I shall ring—”

“No need to ring!” cried my lord, stepping from his hiding place, and taking his kinswoman’s hand. “Now, gentlemen,” eyeing them from head to foot, “might I ask your business? But hold, I know it.

You dare not arrest this lady on mere suspicion ! ”

My lady recoiled.

“ Suspicion, my lord, certainly not,” returned the Captain, “ but we have proofs here, tangible evidence,” showing the scroll.

“ Indeed,” said my lord, suavely, “ have you looked over this ‘tangible evidence’? For my part, I think they look more like useless family papers. I may be mistaken; I can’t vouch for my infallibility. But, still, it would be satisfactory to know for a dead certainty. What say you, gentlemen? Take your own time; unfold them. Your time shall be ours, by all means.”

Taking his kinswoman aside, he commenced a whispering conversation with her that changed the whole aspect of affairs. I saw her start; it was but natural, certainly, for he told her that, being forewarned of that which threatened, “ *he had taken the original papers from their place into his possession, and substituted in their stead some worthless documents.* ”

The Captain and man, already in doubt, unrolled the scroll. They were, as my lord

had said, family papers, grants for the possession of lands and houses, mortgages belonging to the dead and gone Nortons, deeds, &c. In short, nothing but a collection of worthless old sheets, of no use to anybody, were found. The soldiers, with many apologies and expressions of sincere regret for their intrusion, moved towards the door, about to bow themselves out. My lord recalled them.

“ Stay ! ” he cried. “ I charge you officers to take under arrest the man de la Motte.”

The men turned hastily to the corner where de la Motte had stood. *Had stood*, indeed, for seeing the change of affairs, and the window being open, the bird had flown ; in other words, he had slipped through their fingers in time for his own safety, and was, doubtless, by this time, at a good distance off.

Nothing was to be done but pursuit. Promising to do all that lay in their power for the renegade’s speedy capture, the officers left with a perfect belief that de la Motte had purposely deceived them.

Scarcely had the door closed, when my lady, who had hitherto remained standing

like a lifeless statue, went straight to her kinsman, and taking his hand, half covered by the ruffles, imprinted a kiss on it. Far more eloquent in gratitude, I believe, than the finest piece of oratory would have been.

“Cousin,” said my lord gravely, “you have escaped a great danger, but though you thank me as your saviour, I am not he.”

“Not you? Who then?” she asked eagerly. “Not, not Harold, surely?” for my lord was pointing to me, standing a little distance from the two, downcast and sad, with my arm in a sling, for I had sustained such severe injuries after the leap of the preceding night, that I was compelled to have my arm bandaged.

“Yes,” answered her kinsman, “Harold, the one against whom that scoundrelly spy had been speaking. You believed all those vile tales against this poor, brave lad. Ah, cousin, you did very wrong—but it can be repaired—and so I leave you. Be the just and generous woman I think you, for I swear you have been most cruel to the boy for the last two months, treating him almost like a servant, by George!” Commencing mildly,

and finishing with most unusual wrath, my lord flung out of the room.

I felt very uneasy. There was an oppressive silence which at that moment I would have given worlds to have had broken by someone's entrance, say, Colonel Death or the Abbé. Such an uncomfortable still ! The very regular ticking of the clock seemed but a mockery.

At last my lady spoke. She had seated herself ; her arm leaned on the table, and her hand covered the uppermost part of her face. She appeared to be in deep thought, so deep, indeed, that when she had bidden me to approach, she seemed to be unaware that I had obeyed her, and was awaiting her commands for at least ten minutes.

Suddenly she glanced up, very pale, but as composed as if nothing unusual had occurred.

“ What have you done to your arm ? ” she asked, gently.

I blushed to the roots of my hair as I replied —

“ I hurt it by leaping.”

“ Leaping ? Where ? ”

“Out of window,” I returned, reluctantly.

And so she questioned me until I was forced to blurt out the whole truth of my adventure and discovery.

A beautiful ring was sparkling on her third finger; this she took off and gave to me. I murmured something about my not having done anything to deserve such a present, for, indeed, I thought I had not.

“I have wronged you, Harold, I know,” she said, not noticing my embarrassment; “wronged you, by thinking ill of you. But if I can do anything to repair it, believe me, I will. Thanks are but poor reward, I know, for such a service as you have rendered me.”

“Enough, dear mistress, enough for me,” I cried. How gladly I would have spared that proud woman her self-chastisement!

“No, not enough for me,” she continued, sorrowfully. “I know that, whatever I do, I could not repay in full measure all that I am indebted to you.”

“Indeed, madam, you could,” I interrupted, “by saying nothing more of it.”

“Henceforward, no more as my page, but as an honoured guest and dear friend,

you shall stay with me till your father thinks it time for you to leave."

"Dear mistress," I said, taking her hand and kissing it gratefully, "I ask but one favour."

"Name it."

"That you will permit me to continue my duties as heretofore."

"Do you ask no more?" she asked, almost incredulously, taking my hands in hers almost affectionately, and looking at me penetratingly.

"No, indeed not, madam," I answered, my gaze meeting hers unflinchingly, for I spoke the honest truth, and of which none need ever be ashamed. "I ask, and at present certainly wish, nothing more, except, except—" I added, hesitatingly.

"You are not afraid of me, Harold, are you?" asked my poor mistress, with a mournful smile.

"No, madam. I only wish"—my anger and pity getting the upper hand—"that they will catch that villain de la Motte."

At the mention of that name my lady quickly released my hands, and uttering a

low cry of anguish, covered her face with them.

What had I done ? What had I done ? I questioned myself. My heart was so full of remorse and sorrow that I knelt down, completely forgetting, and blubbering like a child, besought her to calm herself.

In after years, I remembered what she said to me that night ere she retired—"Might I never know what it was to have love for a creature unworthy of it." Yes, "Might I never know what it was to have love for a creature unworthy of it." The words rang in my ears for a long time after they were said. When the experience was mine I had almost forgotten them.

CHAPTER XIII.

ONE morning, as I was giving the finishing touch to my hair—from a child it always took a long time to comb out thoroughly, because it was so uncommonly thick and curly—there came a rap at the door. Now, there was nothing unusual in this, and *entre-nous*, already arrived at the mature age of sixteen, I had serious thoughts of cultivating that universally-supposed embellisher of the countenance masculine—a moustache. Emulated by a noble ambition to possess one, I had already commenced to shave. To all ideas, then, the rap proceeded from Hilbert's knuckles, bringing the water wherewith my youthful ardour might vent itself—to find scope as it were—in plainer terms, to shave.

I was in high spirits. My mistress, true to her word, ever since that memorable night, three years ago, had been as a dear friend and protector to me; besides which the charming French lady, who had sat by my side at dinner on the first night of my arrival at the castle, seemed to have taken kindly to me, *malgré* my sixteen and her twenty-five years. And lastly, and not least, I had but two days ago been on a visit to my father, and had seen him and my little kins-women in perfect happiness and tolerable health. He had arranged that I should return to Steyneville for good after a little longer stay with my lady, who did not feel disposed to part so easily with her favourite. Yes, however unworthy, I had gained her esteem and affection, and it certainly was reciprocated. But to return to the rap. At the time I did what any other mortal would have done under the circumstances—I said “Come in.”

Hilbert popped his face in. Strangely solemn it looked, I remarked, even though at the time I felt disposed to see everything *couleur de rose*.

“ Oh, Master Steyneville, pray make haste.

Someone has come from the Hall, Birch I think he said his name was, and that he had something particular—something very pressing to tell you."

"I will be down in one minute," said I, alarmed and wondering. I did not know what to make of it.

When I came down I found Birch, our old servant, waiting for me.

"What's the matter. For Heaven's sake tell me," I cried, dismayed by the old man's look.

"Be quick, Master Harold," he returned laconically, "and get on your things."

"My things!" I exclaimed; "what things? Do you mean my hat and coat?"

He nodded, his face working fearfully.

Though well accustomed to his spartanic brevity of speech, I was far from content. I intimated that I required to know what the matter was, and the cause of his coming, ere I arrayed myself to follow him.

"Your father," he replied, briefly.

My fears were now thoroughly aroused. I besought him to tell me if he were ill—if he were—I could not bring myself to say the

word, but stayed stock-still speechless, with my hand on the lappel of his sleeve.

“My master, the blessed master,” he fairly sobbed out, all his laconism entirely forsaking him, “is dying, dying—and if you don’t make haste, Master Harold, ye’ll never see him alive in this world again.”

* * * *

He was lying on the bed when I entered the room, asleep I thought. It was night, and very dark without. Ever and anon the gusts of a cold wind blew mournfully around the house, but his apartment was warm, the lamp burned bright and cheerfully. I stooped over the bedside to look at him. He was not much changed; disease could not steal that gentle, melancholy expression away. He suffered from no curable illness, I knew. The doctors said he endured some internal malady, a wasting which was wholly impossible for human hands or faculties to stay. They gave no special name to it; it was simply a wasting of long duration, apt to bring the sufferer to a sudden end.

What where my sentiments as I looked

at that dear form so prostrated, possibly sleeping his last sleep on earth, ere awaking to another, a grander life? I had been so blithe and joyous that very morning, and now—and now—I felt I could not allow him to leave me—a mighty weight was on my breast. I tried to utter his name, but the word would not come. I sunk on my knees with a despairing groan.

He started. “Harold,” he cried, in his tender voice, perceiving me on the ground with my face hid in my hands. “My boy, hast thou—come, at last?—come to see me again?”

I staggered to my feet. Seizing his hand, I covered it with passionate kisses.

“Nay, nay, my father,” I cried, “pray, pray do not leave me. Oh God, take me, take me in his stead!”

“Hush, hush, dear; this is blasphemy. Thou knowest the Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away—finish it, Harold.”

“Blessed be the name—no, no, I cannot,” I answered, madly.

He held up his hand reverently, and repeated the whole text, after which he had me

sit by his side, which I did humbly and contritely, clasping his hand in mine.

“Now,” he said, his breath coming short and thick, “my only, my dearly loved son—I wish particularly—that thou shouldst be a guardian and protector to thy poor orphan cousins. Remember—” he paused.

My head was bowed, and I could answer nothing.

“I give them both in thy charge ; be kind and tender to them,” he continued, rather more feebly. “Tell me thou wilt.”

I heard him, and my voice answered strangely to my own ears—

“I will.”

“They are provided ; yes, I trust thee. But thou thyself, my poor, poor friendless boy, what will become of thee ? Is there not one to whom I may entrust thee ?”

He was agitated and looked restlessly about him.

“Father,” I cried, brokenly, “I need no one. I—”

“Thou art so young to be left quite alone in this cold world. God, in Thy great mercy,” he prayed, “send this orphan a friend !”

The prayer was heard, for the door softly opened, and on the threshold stood Lord Alingdale !

* * * * *

The lamp was burning dimly now ; a strange, holy calm pervaded the room of the dying. Even my rebellious heart was softened, and I thought of him not as passing from me for ever, but only for a time, and only from my sight. The troubled waters would soon be at rest for ever, and no more would the earthly storms of woe and sorrow have power to disturb them.

He seemed to have fallen into a light slumber, and a wonderful look was on his face, an ineffable expression, as if he saw that which is denied to the living, as if he saw the space of light, existing beyond the boundaries and confines of the earth.

He lay so still, that I already thought—thought—Heaven only knows how perturbed and confused my mind was *then*—that his life was extinct, and that I was alone indeed. I thought this, I say, in a kind of stupor, for I stood by his side like an immovable block, staring vacantly and speechless.

I was roused by a movement of Lord Alingdale. He bent over the almost inanimate form of my dear, dear father, and applied his ear to his breast. The dark hair of the atheist touched his face, as he leaned over him.

“He lives,” he whispered.

“He lives,” I echoed under my breath, several times, for I could not impress the fact on my mind, stunned as it was. For I had been so unprepared for the shock; when I had seen him last he was apparently full of life and health. If I had only had an inkling of the awful blow it was fated I should receive—if my dear father had but mentioned his long, silent suffering to me—which in his loving kindness he had not—I might—I might, but no—I would have broken down as I did then.

We watched him silently. Although my lord had told me he lived, I despaired of all hope of ever hearing him speak again. The lamp burned lower and lower; the wind, which had abated in its violence, now blew round the house mournfully and sadly, as if wailing a dirge for the dead. “Dead!” I

cried, with a shudder. "O, my father! dead so soon!" And I sunk to my knees by the bedside. But he was not. He had heard the voice of his son, and he had risen, and stretched his arms towards me. But ere I could be folded in his embrace, he fell back again, powerless, on his pillow.

"Irene—Harold—forgiveness—love!" he murmured under his breath, and with a countenance lighted up as by the holy radiance of no earthly vision, the noble spirit passed away from the world.

And we were left in darkness with the sainted dead, for the lamp went out as the last words fell from his lips.

* * * * *

I was alone. It was twelve o'clock. Two hours after his death I remember I tried to collect my thoughts, to *think*, but it was useless; grief had distracted me, and in a sort of frenzied sorrow I paced my room as one possessed.

Presently a knock followed by the appearance of Batty, with a face distorted, red, and swollen by crying, stood before me.

"O, Master Harold," she said, brokenly,

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“ my blessed, my darling, my only young master now, we—we—have looked high and low for Miss Allie, and—and we can’t find her anywhere.”

Scarcely knowing what I did, I sought out my lord, who had generously promised my poor father to be my guardian till I was of age. I found him in the breakfast parlour, sunk in a deep reverie. I explained myself as well as I could to the effect, of course, that my little kinswoman was not to be found.

“ Since when has she been missing ? ” asked my lord.

“ Ever since *then*, ” answered the good old woman, striving hard to repress her emotion, “ I forgot all about my young mistresses, and when I at last got to think of them, I put Miss Annie to bed—the poor little dear asked me, if—if the master was better, and I says, like the sinful old woman that I am, ‘ yes.’ But Miss Allie stamped and cried, and wouldn’t go to bed till she had kissed good-night, and—and—now we can’t find her nowhere.”

My lord snatched up a candlestick. I prepared to follow him.

“No, Harold, you remain here. I had better go alone,” he said gently.

I understood the allusion, and remained where I was. He ascended the wide old staircase, and was soon lost to view.

In about ten minutes time I heard his foot-step on the last step of the stair. I ran to the door to see with what success his search was crowned. What a picture met my eyes! In his arms, as tenderly as a woman, he held the lost child. With her beautiful golden head pillow'd on his shoulder, and her long fringed eyelids closed, she slept as peacefully and well as in her little white bed above stairs.

He had found her clasping the cold form of her dear dead protector in her warm living arms, with her young fair head leaning against the old grey one.

Life and death, youth and age together!

O, Almyra Marlande! O, my fair kins-woman! would it not have been better for thee to have passed away from the world *then*—in thy innocent and young days, and by the side of thy loved friend and kins-man? But it was not to be; thy destiny was to be worked to its dark end.

CHAPTER XIV.

Two weeks after the obsequies of my dear father, and I had become a little more reconciled to my lot, Batty placed a letter in my hand, which ran as follows :—

“ MY DEAR BOY,

“ Hearing of the sad bereavement you have suffered, I hasten to offer you all the consolation I can. I wish to tell you that Norton Castle will be a home to you until you are old enough to make one of Steyne-ville yourself. This is not all. My kinsman, Lord Halifax, hath told me that you have two cousins, if I mistake not their names are Almyra and Anita. To these, then, I offer my protection and guardianship. Understand me well. They shall come to me, these poor and, but for you, friend-

less children, with a double claim to my regard and affection. Firstly, because I think the time has come when I may show to some extent my gratitude to *you*, their kinsman, for the great service you rendered me some years ago" (she alluded to the de la Motte affair); "and secondly, because they are alone. Do not refuse my offer, even if your pride revolt against it" (my pride! forsooth); "remember these poor little ones will suffer by it. In your great bleak house they, like flowers, would die for want of light, sunshine, and gaiety. No, now-a-days there must be no old castles where in durance vile are incarcerated two fair princesses with trusty, albeit rusty dragons to guard them! Besides, who would be the knight to set them free? Not one of our bepowdered, beplushed, beruffled, and bepainted dandies of to-day, surely!"

"No, Harold, no; bring them both to me. l'Abbé Chatronière is ready to teach them, and I to lovethem for their own and your sake.

"With affectionate regards,

"Most sincerely yours,

"OLYMPIA NORTON."

My lord was seated not far from me as I read this with Mistress Almyra on his knee, laughing at her shrewd, childlike questions and answers. Again, as on the day when I first left Steyneville for Norton Castle, a pang shot through my heart, for I loved as well as a boy of sixteen could this little laughing, saucy maid; and I was almost angry to see her so friendly with a stranger. Annie was bending over a piece of needlework, working swiftly, and, as her wont, speaking but when spoken to.

With mingled feelings of gratitude and sorrow I read this letter. Gratitude to my kind mistress for her offer, and sorrow to leave the old place, with all the dear memories of the departed still lingering about it.

“Any news?” inquired my lord, looking at me keenly, and stopping in his play with my cousin, who pouted instantly at his lack of attention.

He read the letter which I handed to him with an unmoved countenance.

“Do you intend to accept my kinswoman’s offer?” he asked, when he had concluded its perusal.

I replied in the affirmative, with many expressions of sincere thankfulness for my mistress's goodness. Having arranged that we would leave Steyneville as soon as my cousins' goods and effects were packed, I rose to give the necessary orders for our speedy departure. Batty and Birch were to reside at the Hall and take charge of it, as heretofore.

"Now," said my lord, turning to Almyra, and taking her two little hands in his, "what do you think we are going to do with you and your sister there?"

"Give us some sweeties?" asked the little glutton.

"Nay, not that," smiled the amused nobleman; "we are going to take you both away—"

"Away!" echoed Allie. "Where?"

"Away!" echoed Annie's eyes, as she raised them from her work, though she herself said nothing.

"Yes, away to a beautiful lady, who is going to love you both. This beautiful lady lives in a beautiful house."

"O, goody, goody," cries miss, clapping

her hands. "Are we going now—this very minute?"

She had already forgotten in her bright anticipations the form of her late protector lying alone in the cold distant churchyard.

But Annie sunk her head, and I saw two glistening tears fall upon her work. *She*, at least, had *not* forgotten. No, there were two who remembered the departed still.

* * * * *

A month after the foregoing the two cousins were fairly installed in their new domicile. Perhaps there is no need to say that Allie, the petted and caressed at home, was doubly petted and caressed by the people and visitors living in and visiting at the Castle. Gaily dressed dandies, with their finicking ways,—grave, pompous gentlemen, with deep voices and sombre coats, all assisted to spoil the captivating child. The little puss would mimic my lady's chaplain,—l'Abbé Chatronière, grown much fatter, and speaking worse English than ever—to his face, and absolutely refused to take any lessons from him, or anyone else.

When the Abbé first approached her with the same book from which Annie had lately acquitted herself extremely well, she asked him in comical French what he wanted.

“Mademoiselle,” returned the little divine promptly, “will take her lesson, is it not? See,” he added coaxingly, “what nice words are herein inscribed, all to make you clever and good.”

“Nay, monsieur,” returned the little reprobate, with a curtsey, “if it takes so much trouble to be clever and good, je ne veux pas être ni l’un ni l’autre. J’aimerais mieux rester méchante et bête—comme je suis.”

The Abbé, simply aghast at this response, hurried instantly to my lady, and acquainted her of the young lady’s decision. My lady, acting contrary to expectation, burst into a fit of laughter, and, instead of being chided for naughtiness, I am sorry to say my little kinswoman was spoiled more than ever. After a good deal of reflection, I came to the conclusion that I was not performing my father’s last commands to my satisfaction. He bade me be a guardian to my young cousins, and I asked myself, Was I. My

conscience answered, No. So I was resolved, at all cost, that Almyra *should* study, and not grow up wild and ignorant. My lady had often besought of her to take her lessons like her gentle, docile sister, but all to no purpose. If miss were not stubborn, she would burst into tears and beg to be taken back to Steynevile, and that uncle would never have made her do things she did not wish to do, &c. ; speaking, in brief, as if she were the most ill-used of mortals, the most unloved, and the most lonely. Indeed, her powers of persuasion and resistance were so great, that, after a little time, my mistress gave up the task of compelling her to apply herself to a book as useless, and begged me to see if my eloquence on the subject had any effect.

One day, being alone with the little rebel, I seized the opportunity to launch into the project I had in view.

“ Almyra,” said I, gravely, “ come here to me.” She advanced half-way, and stopped with her head hanging. “ Nearer,” I said, “ nearer still; I want to speak to you seriously.”

Contrary to anticipations, she came close to me with her head thrown back and a look expressive of supreme defiance.

“This will never do,” thought I; “harshness, austerity will avail nothing. If I could but appeal to her better nature, I think I could carry into effect my plans;” and so I drew her on my knee, and commenced, I must confess, a very prosy tirade on the evil of idleness. “Now,” I asked, in conclusion, “would you not like to please me—like Annie does?”

“Nay,” returned the rebel, quite unshaken in her resolve; “I like to please myself far more.”

“But this is selfish and wicked,” I answered, as severely as I could, for there was no being really angry with the little witch.

“O, Allie darling,” cried Annie, rising from her work, “say you don’t mean that. Indeed she does not, cousin Hally,” seeing my grieved expression, put on expressly for the occasion; for, despite her naughtiness, the child was perfectly charming.

“I mean what I say,” responded Allie, ungraciously, with a pout of her rosy nether lip.

“No, you do not,” said the elder sister, her arm stealing round the younger one’s neck. “Allie, dear, if you will not please our cousin and Lady Norton, think of our dear uncle who is now dead. Would he love Allie,” she sobbed, “any more if he knew she spoke like this? O, say you will be good, darling!”

At the mention of her uncle’s name, the only person the child had ever cared or tried to please, she burst into a passion of tears and hid her face on Annie’s shoulder.

Having, as I thought, successfully appealed to her better nature, I waited the result. Full of expectation, the next evening I asked the Abbé if he had found Almyra more tractable with her lessons that day. He lifted his eyes to the ceiling and replied mournfully in the *negative*.

I was at my wits’ end, turning over in my mind what plan I should adopt next. I remained awake half the night in profound thought. At last, Eureka! I had found it. I would appeal to her *Vanity* as a last resort, as all other devices had proved futile; so, taking my little kinswoman again on my

knee next day, when my plans were fully matured, I prepared to give her the medicine hidden in a sweetmeat, as you shall hear.

She sate quite comfortably on my lap. I had promised her something she loved above all other things, viz., a tale. She had graciously promised to award me a kiss if I told it to her entire satisfaction. "But it's to be a nice one!" she stipulated decisively.

Thus warned, I began as follows:—

"Once upon a time, long, long years ago, in a beautiful kingdom by the sea, there lived a great king who had two daughters."

"Pretty ones?" asked the listener, with enwrapped, earnest eyes.

"I will tell you that presently, but you must not interrupt."

"Now, one of the two princesses," I continued, "was perfectly lovely. She had glorious black hair—"

"Black," mused the little girl on my knee, depreciatingly; "I always thought princesses had golden hair."

"*Black*," I returned, with more emphasis, "quite black, and dark eyes, and a straight

nose" (Allie instinctively felt hers), " and an exquisite figure. So beautiful, indeed, was her person, that everybody fell in love with her at first sight; but it was at sight only, for everybody agreed that when she spoke she talked dreadful nonsense. And do you know why this was? No? Well, because when she was a little girl she refused to learn anything, or, in fact,—to do anything that was right."

"What was her name?" asked Almyra, eyeing me suspiciously, with her bright grey eyes wide open.

"Her name, her name, was—O, yes, I remember now, of course; how foolish of me to forget such a celebrated personage—her name was Maryanna—"

"I do not like that name," remarked her little ladyship, decisively, her suspicions entirely evaporating.

"Nay, there is no occasion," said I. "But to continue. Her sister, the Princess Lily, on the contrary, was not at all good-looking, and people who only saw her, and never spoke to her, called her quite plain. But she was so amiable and so industrious that

people who *did* know her called her charming. Besides, she was so clever that she could do anything, from writing a Greek play down to making a plum-pudding."

"Fie! fie, Hally! what a fib!" murmured Allie, reproachfully.

"Indeed," I said, striving hard to repress a laugh, "she not only *could*, but she *did*. Well, one day the king, their father, received a message from a mighty neighbouring prince to the effect that he (his royal highness) intended to pay a visit to his gracious majesty, with the ultimate end in view of espousing the lovely princess Maryanna, with whose portrait the prince had fallen violently in love. His majesty, the papa of the royal damsels, had no objection to this arrangement, and sent back word with a herald dressed in gleaming golden armour to say he would be delighted to see Prince Daffodil (for so the neighbouring prince was called), who might come as soon as he pleased, for he, on his part, was ready to receive his handsome young highness with open arms.

"Everything, then, being arranged on a most stupendous scale, from the triumphal

arches upwards, the prince entered the city amidst a vast amount of acclamations and trumpet-blowing, effected by a delighted people. But he had no ear for applause just then—”

“ Was he deaf, then, cousin ? ” demanded Allie, innocently.

“ O, no,” said I, “ not at all. What I meant to say was, being so much in love with Princess Maryanna, he didn’t care a fig for anything else but to see her and avow his passion.”

“ Ah, yes,” sighed Allie ; “ how very nice. But go on, please.”

“ When he had greeted the king he begged to be shown to the princess’s boudoir. He found her sewing silk flowers on a piece of satin—doing it very badly, too ; but this was excusable, you know, because she was a princess. Her sister Lily was seated in a corner of the room sewing buttons on her royal papa’s shirts.

“ ‘ How beautiful thou art, sweet princess ! ’ cried the prince, falling at his ladylove’s feet; ‘ and how divinely industrious ! ’ ”

“ But wasn’t it rather sudden, that falling

on his knees ?" remonstrated miss, her ideas of propriety scandalised.

"Not at all. Did I not tell you Prince Daffodil had been loving her for a long time in private? Well, when he found her in every respect, in form and feature, so exactly like her portrait, he could no longer restrain his transports, but said, 'How beautiful thou art !'

"Now, the princess being as stupid as an owl—"

"How do you know an owl is stupid, cousin Harold?" demanded miss, authoritatively.

"People say so," I replied, hastily.

"The princess, instead of blushing and turning her head aside, as she ought to have done, replied calmly, 'I know I am.' "

"That is curious," remarked Allie, musingly. "But go on."

"Yes, that's what she said. So the prince naturally stared, but thinking his ears had misgiven him, he commenced to speak to her on a variety of subjects. At last, finding her replies to every question he asked so ridiculously stupid, he rose from her side

completely disgusted. On the pretence of fearing to offend her sister if he did not speak to her a while, he passed over to the Princess Lily's side, and was so delighted and enchanted by her wit, conversation, cleverness, and modesty, that he fell in love with her, and forgot all about Mary-anna.

“ Next day the young prince went to the king, who sate in council with his eyes shut—thinking deeply, no doubt—and, giving him a gentle but firm shake, desired a parley with his majesty. The king, with natural candour, bade all the courtiers and counsellors go to Jericho, and, knowing on what business the prince intended to speak, winked at him openly, and dug his handsome prospective son-in-law in the ribs.

“ ‘ Enough of this sorry jesting, though,’ cried the monarch, ringing a golden bell studded with diamonds with his own kingly hand; ‘ we will have 'em both sent here. Send the two princesses here, you fellow,’ cried he, with dignity, to the servant, who tremblingly answered his dread master's summons.

“In two minutes the sisters entered. ‘Here,’ said the king, a tear trickling down his royal nose as he spoke; taking the hand of the Princess Maryanna—‘Here, take her, my lad, and may you be happy. Boo-hoo!’

“‘Gad! that’s not the one,’ answered the prince as soon as he had recovered from his amazement; ‘no, ’tis the sweet Princess Lily. For the one that possesses the treasures of the mind is worth ten thousand times more than she who has but the fleeting and tawdry beauty of the face.’

“So saying, the prince clasped the gentle lady in his arms, and having already obtained her father’s consent, married her offhand, and lived happily ever after.”

“And what became of the other, the lovely Princess Maryanna?” asked my little kinswoman, earnestly, getting from my knee.

She was quick enough to see the likeness between Maryanna and herself.

“O, she—she,” I replied, hesitating, “she died of vexation and jealousy soon after the marriage of her plain sister.”

I congratulated myself on having so easily disposed of her highness, for Heaven only

knows what questions concerning her after-life Almyra would not have put to me.

* * * * *

That evening, as I was busily engaged in copying some music for my fair French friend, Mdlle. de Montbron, the French lady I have already spoken of, the Abbé entered and tapped me on the shoulder.

Wondering what could have caused this unusual visit, I laid down my quill and waited for him to speak first, which he presently did.

“Ha,” said he, “thou art astonished, my infant, that I come to see thee, to interrupt thee à la fin, at the end; but I wish to speak to thee of the fair little rebel, Almyra.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes, indeed, my faith. This afternoon, as I sit reading to myself, just having finished with the docile, gentle Mdlle. Annie, I hear a light step, and on looking up I find it is none other than Mdlle. la rebelle herself with a lesson-book in her hand. I wait patiently for her to speak, wondering at her visit, like thou dost at mine. At last, in a brave, firm little voice, she says—‘M. l’Abbé,

j'ai appris ma leçon, et je vous assure que je ne serais pas plus méchante, voulez-vous m'econter et me pardonner ?' I cannot resist her. I take the book from her hand and cry, 'A la bonne heure ;' and then she recites her leçon in such a wonderful fashion, so exactly and so intelligently, that I cannot but clap my hands and open my eyes with astonishment and ma foi ! oui—admiration !' cried the Abbé, with great animation. "What think'st thou of it, my brave ? It is a transformation, a wonder. *Aprés cela*, I shall be surprised at nosing, absolutely nosing, in the whole of the universe !"

I feigned an astonishment almost as intense as that of the good little divine himself. And no one ever knew the true reason of Almyra's sudden attachment to study save myself.

CHAPTER XV.

IT was one of the grand *jeu* nights, and beneath the hospitable roof of Norton Castle were assembled a very fine company. Indeed, it was a very galaxy of wit, talent, valour, and beauty that graced the noble halls of Norton.

The gay Mr. Prior, the satirical Mr. Pope, the savage Irish Dean, Swift, kept the gentlemen below stairs, still at their wine, in a continuous roar; whilst the witty Lady Mary Wortley and the beautiful Miss Howard reigned jointly over the little kingdom above stairs. Little Mr. Pope had been a great admirer of Lady Mary Wortley, but ever since she had corrected his unwelcome attentions with a sounding box on the ear the poet had ceased to regard the spirited lady in

the same amiable light as heretofore, and now never lost an opportunity of abusing her, publicly and privately; but she who was most concerned heeded him the least, laughing most good-humouredly at every fresh piece of malignity uttered by the unforgiving small-minded genius and told her by her dear friends.

Coloured lights innumerable, dresses resplendent with gems and lace, and faces charming with the smiles of gaiety and pleasure, graced the salon where the ladies sate chatting after dinner. And, ye gods, what chatter it was! I declare, on my honour, the prattle of children was not more free or innocent than that of these gaily-dressed dames. Now and then the hearty, jolly laughter of my mistress and Lady Mary sounded above all the rest. And it was laughter too! None of your mincing giggles; none of your young ladies' titter —he! he!—but a kind and sincere ha! ha! ha! ha! which did your heart good to listen to, and inclined you to join in though you could not tell the wherefore.

I was seated at one end of the room by the

side of my fair enslaver, Mdle. de Montbron. Poor lad that I was, I imagined the lady was interested in my conversation, and—myself, and gave no heed to the oft-repeated questions, “Are the gentlemen soon coming up from their wine?” and “How long do they usually linger over their cups when the ladies have left the table?” Ah, me! *Then* I thought it but artless curiosity without a motive; *now* I know otherwise. For the fair coquette was never happy unless she had some heart to captivate—even though a boy’s, in absence of a manlier one. A feminine Alexander, in brief, who would have wept had she no more worlds, that is to say hearts, to conquer. I was sitting, by her side I say, trying to make myself agreeable and pleasant as possible when my lady’s woman, Sara, entered the room, and whispered, with a scared face, a few words in her ear. On this my lady rose with an ejaculation of astonishment, and, looking at me, beckoned me to her. Making a hasty apology to my fair companion, I hurried across the room, and asked my lady, with a bow, what she wished.

“ Ein hübscher knabe, wahrfaitig ” (“ A fine lad, truly ”) said Lady Mary Wortley, looking at me critically.

“ Meine dame,” I returned, with a deep bow. “ I bin ihnen sehr verbunden für ihre gute meinung ” (“ I am much obliged to you for your good opinion.”)

“ My dear Wortley,” broke in my lady, “ a truce to your compliments, for at present I am in great trouble.”

“ Trouble ? ”

“ Yes, trouble. Fancy, my woman coming to put my two little nieces ” (for so she was good enough to call my two cousins) “ to bed, only finds the eldest—the youngest, my pretty Allie, is nowhere to be found ! What shall I do ; advise me, my dear Wortley. And you, Harold, for Heaven’s sake, go in the grounds and see if you can find her wandering about there.”

I was about to make off in all possible haste when—

“ Stay, stay, Master Harold,” called out Lady Mary ; and to enforce obedience to her commands, she actually caught hold of a handful of my *curls* and held them tightly

in her grasp. "There, now," she continued, laughing, "Mercury cannot go about his errand ; and I can assure you, my poor Norton, there is no cause for fear. That charming little niece of yours is all safe and sound, I'm certain. Shall I tell you where I think she is ? Yes ? Then go downstairs to that Hades, where those merry devils are drinking, and fetch from thence thy Eurydice ; go, Orpheus ! "

Needing no second command, I posted out of the room with commendable celerity, and soon reached the door of the dining-hall, and stayed awhile, with my hand on the door, to regain the breath I had lost before entering.

Presently, wondering at the absolute quiet which reigned within, and hearing no sound from a place where the greatest clamour and noise usually prevailed, I opened the door deftly, and stepped in unobserved.

There a wonderful sight and sound met my eyes. At first I was inclined to imagine myself under the influence of a fantastic delusion ; but no, the scene was too real to be the offspring of a fevered brain. What was it I saw ? What was it I heard ?

This: In the centre of the room, under the cynosure of about forty pairs of eyes, stood Miss Almyra Marlande, singing to the gentlemen, in her fresh, true ringing little voice, the following, a rondel of the fourteenth century:—

Allez vous en, Allez, Allez,
Souci, soins, et melanoolie
Me cuidez-vous toute ma vie
Gouverneur comme fait avez? etc.

With a natural grace, perfectly irresistible, and with the boldness of childish innocence and vanity combined, the little maid sung the singularly appropriate song. When it was ended the storm of applause that followed was decidedly prolonged as it was well-merited. As for myself, I was perfectly horrified. To me it seemed veritably the dove in a nest of hawks; although, it must be confessed, a very good-natured, well-dressed, and, on the whole, kindly disposed set of hawks.

I came forward hurriedly, and whispered her to come with me.

“Nay,” says the little maid, aloud, “I do not wish to go, cousin Hally.”

“To go! No, certainly not,” exclaimed

my Lord Alingdale, with a good-humoured laugh. “Come, Harold, old fellow, and sit here,” pointing to a vacant seat; “and, Miss Marlande, allow me to present you with this brooch as a slight acknowledgment for the sweet song with which you have favoured us.”

So saying, he unclasped a beautiful little brooch, all set in brilliants, from his neck-ruffle, and gave it to my young kinswoman.

“My lord,” I said, in a low voice, “for Heaven’s sake consider she is but a child; and although she does not know the value of such presents—”

“Bah!” cried the nobleman, with a curse, “what a young, old-fashioned Puritan” (which I certainly was *not*) “thou art. If I have a mind to give the pretty creature my head —no one shall prevent me. Look here, Allie,” he continued, purposely to annoy me, taking the child’s hand and putting a silver dessert plate into it, “go round to each of these beautiful gentlemen, and let’s see how they’ll remunerate you for your song. Don’t listen to your cousin, but go at once,” he added, in a whisper.

Like a cloud, I remarked, with something of a shudder, his dark, dark hair fall over the bright tresses of the fair girl.

Delighted with her mission, and nothing daunted, Allie took the plate—and the advice. A universal silence was demanded and obtained by my lord, who informed the gentlemen in a few words what was about to take place. The proposition of rewarding the young singer meeting with general favour, she commenced her rounds. Soon the bottom of the plate was almost covered by the glittering heap of jewellery which each dandy in his turn took off his own person to give to my little kinswoman. I say dandy, because Almyra had not as yet approached the greater lights of the assembly. Mr. Pope was the first of these before whom she held her plate, and with a smile quite foreign to his satirical countenance, he asked her what she would care to have in particular of him, as he wore no jewels of any kind. Now, Almyra had lately read one of his poems, which she professed to admire very much; so she said earnestly—

“Are you Mr. Pope?”

“ Yes,” returned the poet ; “ but why do you ask, my fair maid ? ”

“ As you are so clever, so very, very clever, do not give me anything like this ”—pointing to her glittering heap—“ but only give me a little, only a little of your learning ! ”

As he could not comply with the modest request, miss passed on to the next, rather disappointed. This next was Mr. Prior.

“ Put the plate down on the table,” he said, his black eyes twinkling with merriment and bonhomie, “ and I will give you something better than either of these baubles, albeit, not so lasting.”

Almyra wonderingly obeyed. Everyone looked on interested, none guessing what priceless, though ephemeral treasure, the merry poet intended to give the plate-holder. A shout of laughter greeted the present awarded by Mr. Matthew Prior—it was a kiss !

My blood boiled within me—my heart was throbbing wildly with suppressed fury. I could have annihilated the whole assembly had it lain in my power to do so ; but as it was, I could do nothing, so none were hurt

by my wrath, and none the wiser. But Dean Swift looked with a hard eye on the whole proceedings, and when the little plate-holder came to him, he asked her brusquely what she wished.

None had ever spoken like this to her before. The harsh tones, and harsher glance bent on her made her tremble, and a tear of anger started to her eye.

“ I can give ye nothing but advice, child,” he said. “ I am poor, and can cast no rich gems on your plate, like yonder fine, gay, courtly, and gallant gentlemen have done,” with acrimonious emphasis on each adjective; “ but, perhaps, better than pretty toys is good counsel. Take my admonition ; leave this place, and join the women-folk above stairs. There, go away ; thy face and manners are too pretty for honesty ! ”

There was a murmur of disapproval from all sides at this laconic speech to the poor child.

“ Indeed ! ” cried my lord, with a shrug. “ If beauty and virtue are incongruous, what a perfect saint you must be yourself, Mr. Swift ! ”

“Who spoke to you, my lord?” growled the Dean, in no ways pleased with the doubtful compliment.

“No one; therefore I take it upon myself to answer,” returned the other.

“Take heed, my lord. Some people’s pies may be too hot for your fingers,” laughed the jolly Mat Prior.

The two combatants ceased further caviling, and contented themselves with copious draughts from the waters of Lethe.

Allie, with a flushed cheek and angry eye, still went her rounds, nothing daunted or intimidated by the austere language of the Dean. Presently she came to the last person looking on the proceedings with a somewhat rueful expression of countenance—Colonel Death.

“My dear,” he said, looking sorrowfully at the sparkling pile on the plate extended towards him, “I am very, very poor, and haven’t anything but thanks to give you.”

“Very poor!” repeated Almyra, gravely. “Very, very poor, Colonel Death! Truly?”

“Yes, really and truly; very poor,” answered the Colonel, with a comical affectation

of regret, half-earnest for all its *assumed* pretence.

“Then shut your eyes, please, Colonel Death,” cried Almyra, with a delighted little laugh.

“Why?”

“Shut your eyes!” cries miss, a little more imperiously this time.

As a good soldier, under the mandate of a superior officer, the Colonel complied with commendable military promptitude; then, bidding him to hold out his hands, the generous little soul poured into them the whole of her presents, reserving but one thing for herself, the brooch that Lord Alingdale had given her.

The good Colonel’s heart, completely taken by storm at this piece of unlooked-for liberality, swore a big oath; and, throwing the jewels on the table, clasped my young kinswoman in his arms. But Mistress Allie drew herself up with all possible dignity.

“Indeed! Colonel Death,” she cried; “though I did give you those pretty things, I did not give you leave to kiss me. Nay, I

shall go with cousin Hally now ; please to let me go." And drawing herself away, and marching with a stately step to where I sat, the young lady took my hand.

Amid the uproar following her act of generosity, I heard the voice of Mr. Swift, who was not far off from me, muttering something concerning the "spoiling of saucy brats."

My cousin and I were both near the door ready to depart, when my lord called out jestingly —

"Come, Miss Allie ; pray don't you think I deserve a kiss for the pretty brooch I gave you ; eh ? "

Almyra looked hesitatingly, first at me then at her treasure, and lastly at the giver himself, who held out both hands laughingly to her. She demurred no longer, but liberating my hand, which she had hitherto clasped within her own, she approached my Lord Alingdale ; and taking one of the extended hands, raised it to her lips, like a little actress that she was, and kissed it demurely.

"Thank you, my lord," she said, retreating, without giving him time to utter another

word. "Thank you, my lord, and good-night, gentlemen."

Dropping a pretty curtsey, she tripped out of the room with me—with a face that plainly said, "What do you think of that performance?"—in no ways pleased with the scene I had witnessed.

CHAPTER XVI.

I WAS twenty years old when I made my first appearance at Oxford. It was my intention to study there for two years. As my dear father in his lifetime had purposed me for the army, my Lord Alingdale generously promised me a commission when I left College. Indeed, he had all along acted very kindly to me; and so, perhaps, it is no wonder that I grew to love him.

Having bidden an affectionate farewell to my two young cousins and our common benefactress, Lady Norton (who gave me in parting a beautiful pair of diamond shoe-buckles, which I was never exquisite enough to make use of), I started off to Oxford, accompanied by my kind lord. It was dusk when we arrived, and after various

formalities had been passed through, and introductions made, my lord took me aside, and said —

“Now, look ye, Hal, never be afraid to ask me for *anything*. I will do all that lies in my power to get you what you wish—if thou dost not forget me.” (*Forget him!* Why did he say this?—and so bitterly.) “Write to me sometimes, and tell me how you are getting on, and if there is any possibility of your being canonized as a saint—or professor,” he added, laughing. “So good-bye, my boy ;” and ere I had time to expostulate, to express my gratitude, or regret at leaving him, he had shaken my hand most cordially, and, pressing into it a heavy purse, left me standing in a strange place alone.

To remain in a bleak, ill-furnished apartment is, at the best of times, far from agreeable ; but even that unpleasant situation may be enhanced, as it was unquestionably in my case. Here was I seemingly in the midst of utter desolation, knowing nobody, known by none save a pair of fat dons and a morose-looking proctor, all three of whom had vanished. Here was I, I say, in a dimly-

lighted room, without knowing what to do or where to go. Could they entirely have forgotten me? thought I. I went to the door and listened, but no sound of a footstep met my ear, and so I remained as desolate as ever. Fortunately I had a book in my pocket, from which I might learn patience—a little black book, which I loved for itself, and for its associations. Presently, imagining I heard at last the long-wished-for sound of a human tread, I closed the volume, and, placing it on the table, forgot all about it.

My ears had not deceived me, for a tall, lithe, youthful form entered, and, without noticing me, went straight to a bookshelf, which I had not remarked, and taking from thence a book, was about to proceed out again.

“ Ha-hum,” coughed I, “ may I— ”

Before I had time to continue my question the student turned to me and said, in a surprised tone of voice —

“ What! de Crespigny, *you* here? What on earth are you doing? I thought you were up with the other fellows.”

It was my turn to look astonished now,

apart from the fact that the oval face and curly pate inclined towards me were perfectly familiar.

“Indeed,” I returned, “you mistake me. I have just arrived, and thinking I had been forgotten by the gentlemen to whom I have been introduced, I was about to ask you if you will do a fellow-student the kindness to acquaint them—”

“Certainly, with great pleasure. Excuse me for interrupting you, but what *is* your name? You are so uncommonly like some one else here, that I’m afraid there will be no end of mistakes made. In fact, you are a double of de Crespigny, and only that your eyes are very dark—almost black—and his are blue, I see no difference in you. It is perfectly wonderful. Indeed, I never knew anyone *like* de Crespigny, except one.”

“Who was that?” I asked, strangely interested. “I remember *your* face, but I cannot think of your name. Can, can it be Stapleton?” I hazarded, looking at him earnestly.

“Can it be? It is,” returned the other, heartily. “And are you Steyneville?”

“I am,” I said, delighted to see his face again, which had altered but little, and retained the same expression it had worn when we played together at Steyneville Hall years ago.

“Come along, old fellow,” said Sydney, linking his arm in mine, “and I’ll introduce you to de Crespigny, your double, and the rest—not a bad set, I assure you. You have come most propitiously; it happens to be our meeting night. Never mind asking me now the meaning of it, but come and see. How’s Allie? Is she as pretty as she was? I’ve often thought of you two. I suppose I was as far from your thoughts as the Antipodes. Well, Mr. Freshman, I shall be revenged on you now; I intend to obtrude myself very much upon you. What a pretty fellow thou hast grown, too. The fair dames of Oxford will be for eloping with ye at first sight. Never till now have I had occasion to thank the gracious gods for my ugliness—”

“I give you notice, Stapleton,” said I, highly amused with his rattle, “that if you angle in shallow fishless water, even though with good bait, you will catch nothing.”

“ Precisely, my Allegorist ; for the present I have forgotten all about your baggage, which containeth, no doubt, garbs wherewith the transcendent loveliness— ”

“ I cry you mercy ! ” I interposed. “ If you have no objection, my dear fellow, I should like to see my trunks deposited in the room which is destined to be my sleeping apartment, after which I am your humble servant.”

“ Come along, then ; ” and Sydney, in his odd boyish fashion, dragged me impetuously down several flights of stairs, through long dimly-lighted corridors, till at length we arrived at a passage, traversing which, a great sombre-coloured door stared us morosely and ominously in the face. This portal was no unlike the awful one that loomed on Date ages ago on his entrance in Hades, and on which the words, “ Give up all hope ye who enter here ” were inscribed ; the difference being this : the Italian visionist *saw* the terrible all-prospect-blasting sentence ; whereas, here you rather *felt* it. The gloomy-looking door was, after all, but the entrance of one of the proctor’s

studies. Here, after having knocked we entered, and to a fat, pompous little man, Stapleton explained his mission, and introduced myself.

“Ha, yes; just so,” said this personage, without even looking at me. “Mr. Steyneville, how do you do, sir? Well, I hope?” I bowed. “Your room, No. 33, is next to that of de Crespigny. Pray show it to him, Stapleton. Your trunks are already there”

Having thanked him, we *salaamed* low and disappeared, Stapleton now leading me in a totally different direction.

“Pray,” said I, “who is this de Crespigny of whom I am destined to hear so much, and next to whose room I am about to be?”

“Valerian de Crespigny,” said Sydiey, with a light laugh, “is a charming, gloomy, mysterious, generous fellow, as you will find out for yourself. Come along. Here we are. By-the-bye, you’re not shy, are you?”

If my newly-found old comrade was at the moment disposed to consider me so, I soon dispelled his fears on that score by a hearty laugh. Encouraged by the sound, he knocked at the door before-mentioned, and,

receiving permission to enter from a multitude of voices within, we did so together.

I found myself in a good-sized room, well illuminated by numerous wax lights. In the centre, around a great table, were seated about twenty-five young fellows, whose ages varied, I should say, from eighteen to twenty-six. In front of each of these gentlemen was a bottle and a glass, and, judging by a few words I heard on entering, some of them had perhaps made a little too free with the former. Fruits of various descriptions, on fine glass, were placed in the middle of the table, and flowers too. As I gave a hasty glance round I perceived that the owner of the room had no common taste, for beautiful little pictures hung on the walls, and the shelves, perfect miracles of fine carving, arrested the attention of the most unobserving eye, being adorned by antiquities and curiosities of the most valuable description.

Stapleton's entrance with me was the signal for exclamations of surprise, all of which were not entirely of a coherent nature.

“Another Crespigny come to judgment,

"By Jove!" cried the young gentleman, ~~and~~ showing some ~~time~~ in the thumping his ~~table~~ in the same and ~~raising~~ the glass ~~ware~~ ~~upright~~.

"One moment, if you please, gentlemen!" said Sydney, waving his hand as if to command silence.

"It is Bunterly," said the same gentleman again.

"This is a new-comer, friends, Englishmen, and colonymen, an old comrade of mine, for whose stability and natural fairness of character I can vouch. I wish, therefore, to introduce him to our select society, so that with his shining talents and virtues he may become a distinguished member," spake the imperious Sydney, with marvellous gravity.

"Hear! I hear!" cried the assembly.

"To begin with," said Sydney, "allow me to present you to the host, who, doubtless, with my recommendations, will receive you well. Valerian de Crespigny—Harold Steyneville. You must know we recognise no distinction, or title here; we are plain Crespignys, Steynevilles and Stapletons, ~~o~~ misters, sirs, lords, viscounts or anything

~~else~~; simply as we were baptised so we ~~call~~ each other."

I started as I looked full into the face before me. I might have been looking into a mirror, it was so like mine; save the eyes, which were, as Stapleton had said, of a sapphire hue.

Crespigny extended his hand, and as I grasped it within mine a strange thrill passed through me, and I felt as if I could have clasped him in my arms, as if I had found someone near and dear whom I had lost —a strange, unutterable sensation of satisfaction and pleasure. He, on his part, pressed my hand with more kindness and warmth than is usually accorded to an entire stranger, and bade me welcome.

"Now," said Stapleton, gaily, "if you two have finished complimenting and spooning over each other, like a couple of mock-turtles, let's sit down and be comfortable, and let the President read the Society's rules to Steyneville. Woe be to him who infringes them!"

"Introduce me, I entreat ye, Stapleton," said a melanocomous dismal youth, extraordinarily lank of body. ·

by Jove!" cried one young gentleman, after staring some time at me, thumping his fist on the table and causing the glass ware to jingle.

"One moment, if you please, gentlemen!" cried Sydney, waving his hand as if to command silence.

"Go it, *Butterfly*," said the same gentleman again.

"This is a new-comer, friends, Englishmen, and countrymen, an old comrade of mine, for whose stability and natural fairness of character I can vouch. I wish, therefore, to introduce him to our select society, so that with his shining talents and virtues he may become a distinguished member," spake the irrepressible Sydney, with marvellous gravity.

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else; simply as we were baptised so we call each other."

I started as I looked full into the face before me. I might have been looking into a mirror, it was so like mine; save the eyes, which were, as Stapleton had said, of a sapphire hue.

Crespigny extended his hand, and as I grasped it within mine a strange thrill passed through me, and I felt as if I could have clasped him in my arms, as if I had found someone near and dear whom I had lost—a strange, unutterable sensation of satisfaction and pleasure. He, on his part, pressed my hand with more kindness and warmth than is usually accorded to an entire stranger, and bade me welcome.

"Now," said Stapleton, gaily, "if you two have finished complimenting and spooning over each other, like a couple of mock-turtles, let's sit down and be comfortable, and let the President read the Society's rules to Steyne-ville. Woe be to him who infringes them!"

"Introduce me, I entreat ye, Stapleton," said a melanocomous dismal youth, extraordinarily lank of body. .

“That is Kenneth Twyne, the poet, commonly known as the ‘Moth’ in the Society.”

Indeed, I considered this sobriquet singularly appropriate, and was hardly surprised to hear it. We bowed gravely.

“This,” continued Sydney, pointing to another, “is Benedict Hales, or the ‘Adder,’ so dubbed because he is frightfully venomous.” And so he continued to introduce me to the others until he came to the end of the whole circle. It was a perfect Noah’s ark, each gentleman possessing the name of some bird, beast, fish, reptile or insect in conjunction with his own.

“De Crespigny,” added Stapleton in conclusion, “is the only one of us who is called by his proper cognomen, because not a man amongst us can tell what animal he does resemble mostly. Never mind! Dum vivimus vivimus! Here, take the vacant chair between the Moth and de Crespigny, and the rules of the Society shall be read to enlighten your unsophisticated pericranium. As the Moth don’t imbibe much, I give you full permission to assist him in emptying his bottle.”

Having given air to this remarkable piece of generosity and self-denial, the Butterfly sat down with a complacent smile on his countenance, as if he had been doing something remarkably beneficent. "The Moth," or Kenneth Twyne, passed me his bottle with commendable alacrity, and I sat down in my allotted seat, not a little bewildered by my strange surroundings.

The one who had been introduced to me as the Adder read as follows:—

"RULES OF THE ANTE-CONVENTIONALISTS
SOCIETY.

"1. *Each member admitted into the Society must absolutely possess some quality, not in common with the rest of human kind, and if resembling in any way a peculiar species of bird, beast, fish, fowl, reptile, insect or even biped, the said member must not object to the appellation, or rebaptism, allotted him by competent judges.*

"2. *Any member found engaged in an act contrary to the Society's notions of truth and honour, shall be expelled immediately.*

"3. *The ante-conventionalists have the*

full power of giving each other's possessions away to the member or members who shall require them more than the owner.

“4. Any member giving way to wrath, even though momentarily, shall be suspended for the space of two months from the Society's meetings and protection. Rash fools are in no way eligible associates.

“5. An ante-conventionalist found asserting his superiority mentally or physically over a weaker creature shall be expelled. A braggart and a poltroon shall not be tolerated.

“6. As the A. C.'s are supposed to be 150 years in advance (in point of civilisation and opinions) of their fellow creatures, an original idea transcribed on paper with any degree of perspicuity and lucidity shall be discussed, debated, and commented upon, as to its feasibility of carrying out, with the greatest serenity. And any member permitting his feelings to overcome his judgment in the heat of the debate shall be suspended.

“7. The sole aim of the Society is to promote originality and to discourage imitation.”

When he had finished reading these rules I could scarcely repress a smile, as I said —

“They are somewhat rigorous.”

“No,” cried Sydney, “I don’t think them so. What appears to you to be so severe in ‘em?”

“This: In the first rule, I believe it is stated that originality is a compulsory qualification. I am afraid my talents are of too common a kind for you to accept me as a member.”

“Three days are allowed. If within that period nothing peculiar is found in your disposition, Steyneville,” remarked the Adder, a bright looking young fellow, with unconventional familiarity, “all is u. p.”

“Pray,” said I, laughing, “do not pass sentence on me yet, although I fear for my powers.”

“Never you mind, lave yer powers alone,” interrupted Stapleton, imitating an Irishman with considerable skill. “Be jabbers, ye’ll put us all down yet, never fear, ere the three days are over, shure an’ faith.”

“Imitation,” murmured Kenneth Twyne, or the Moth, “is distasteful; in rule seven—”

“O, hang rule seven!” replied Sydney, with vivacity.

“By all means,” returned the dismal youth, in a dreary monotonous voice, which contrasted strangely with the gay tones of the other.

De Crespigny, who had hitherto remained silent, looking, I rather *felt* than saw, at me with considerable earnestness, now turned to the rest, laughing at the fireless warfare carried on between the Moth and the Butterfly, and demanded silence.

“Associates,” the Butterfly began, “having introduced a new-comer into our Society, we have to all appearances forgotten our duties. Have we only assembled to drink? No? Then let us begin. Firstly hath every man his ‘Lucretius?’ Yes? Good.” (All with marvellous dexterity, as one person, whipped out their books—all save de Crespigny.) “I have heard from high authority that someone intends paying us a visit to-night—an inspection—merely to see if we are in order! Let not the person who comes see us imbibing wine from the bottle, but rather knowledge from the book. In short,

associates, let us be found not as we are, but as we should be."

"When you have *quite* finished your oration, perhaps we can commence our duties?" interrupted the Adder, courteously.

Sydney reseated himself with a perfectly unmoved countenance, and pouring himself out a bumper of wine, first waved it graciously, as if calling a *silent* health, and then putting the glass to his lips, drained it to the dregs.

"Pst!" cried a young fellow suddenly, whom I had not noticed before, standing in a listening attitude by the door, "here he is! Be ready; I hear him creeping down the passage, the old sly boots. Quick, you fellows."

In an incredibly short space of time, bottles and glasses disappeared, and in their stead were substituted books and *looks*, the latter of intense study, and profound gravity. De Crespigny, who had not been drinking, leaned listlessly against the mantelpiece, and though looking somewhat jaded and wearied, still with his glance fixed on me. What was that strange attraction? If he turned his eyes

from me, I felt irresistibly drawn to veer my eyes towards him, and vice-versâ.

“Hush!” whispered the same person who had warned the rest before of the enemy’s approach, “he’s listening.”

“E tenebris tantis clarum extollere lumen”

read Sydney, in a sonorous voice, for the special edification of the eavesdropper.

(*Loud*) Confounded be the prying jack-ass
 (*Mumble, mumble, mumble*)
 (*Loud*) Who cometh when he not wanted is ;
 (*Mumble, mumble, mumble*)
 (*Loud*) May he, at no long distance hence,
 (*Mumble, mumble, mumble*)
 (*Loud*) Upon a tree, go hang himself, and die.
 (*Mumble, mumble, mumble*)
 (*Loud*) O doubly accours’d be he who cuts
 His ugly carcase down again.
 “Quod te imitari aveo.”
 Satan reward him for his pains. Ahem !

“Is that correct, gentlemen?”

This exceedingly original translation had scarcely been read, with a countenance almost austere in its wondrous gravity, when the door opened, and the podgy form of a black-gowned gentleman revealed itself.

“Hum!” said the intruder, looking doubtfully at the owners of faces distorted with the futile attempts to suppress mirth.

“ This is an essentially studious gathering I suppose ! I am pleased to find you so becomingly employed, gentlemen ! But might I inquire, sir,” addressing Stapleton, “ what that dark object is projecting from your coat there ? ”

Dark indeed ! Stapleton in an unfortunate haste had not taken sufficient precautions to hide his bottle, so that the neck remained visible to the keen eyes of the little man.

“ Meaning this, sir ? ” asked Sydney, without the ghost of a blush, and drawing forth with remarkable promptitude, the “ dark object ” indicated, to the evident surprise of his companions.

“ Yes, sir,” glowered the other, “ I do, sir. Is it usual for gentlemen to carry about their persons such—such vile concoctions as this ? It is disgraceful, positively disgraceful. You are unfit to associate with your sober-minded companions—yes, sir, I repeat, *unfit*.”

And he did repeat *unfit*, and that with astonishing vehemence too !

“ Not at all, sir,” returned the imperturbable Butterfly, placing his hand upon the bottle ; “ allow me to explain.”

“I shall allow nothing of the kind, sir,” began the other; “I shall report you.”

“As you please, sir,” excessively politely; “but I can justify that which seems to you now so inexcusable. You will agree with me when I say that knowledge is a search for Truth.”

“If I do, that has nothing whatever to do with the matter in hand.”

“Pardon me, sir—everything; only hear me. If I am to be reported, be good enough to state that you found me searching for the Truth.”

“Are you mad?” said the astonished gentleman, retreating as if in reality he considered the irrepressible young fellow afflicted with a dangerous lunacy, which might possibly be of a homicidal nature.

“Not at all—‘In vino veritas’—in wine, sir, there is Truth. Having searched in vain for it in every possible place and book, I come to the conclusion that it must be where the Latins say it is—here,” answered Sydney, pointing to the bottle.

“Pray, have you found it?” asked the other, biting his lips, to repress the smile that

forced itself there, despite his efforts. Even this fierce little man's heart proved susceptible to Sydney's sophistry.

“Ah, sir,” cries the reprobate, with an ingenious assumption of modesty, “that rests not with me to say, for fear I should be tempted to flatter my judgment.”

And so the matter ended. The intruder left as abruptly as he came, and, being a good little man at the bottom, Sydney was not reported after all.

But somehow or other the affair became bruited abroad, and a month after there was not a soul in the whole college who had not become acquainted with Stapleton's logic; indeed, for a great while any argument of a specious and ingenious nature was always dubbed “Stapleton's Logic,” and so it became a perfect by-word amongst us.

CHAPTER XVII.

No sooner had I bidden good-night to my fellow-students, who had expressed their united opinions in so many words that I was an exceedingly good fellow, and entered my room with Stapleton, who stated it was his intention to see me “all safe,” when I became aware of the uncomfortable fact that I had mislaid my dearly-prized book, and for the time could not recollect what I had done with it.

“What’s up, my newly-exhumed old fossil?” asked Sydney, banteringly, noticing my perturbation, “have we been too much for ye?”

“Nay,” said I, unwilling to tell him the true cause; “I have lost *something*.”

“ What is it ? Can’t you tell a fellow ? ”

“ Well,” I interrupted, “ it is not much, being only a little old book.”

“ A little old book, eh ? ” asked Sydney, eyeing me attentively.

“ But I prize it beyond all measure, and wouldn’t lose it for the world,” I said, heartily.

“ And you would not have it lost for all the world. Ha ! ” repeated my volatile friend, swinging his shapely legs to and fro. By-the-bye, he was seated on the chest of drawers.

“ No ; not for the world ! ”

“ What kind of a book is it ? Poetry, romance, fiction, or truth ? ”

“ Truth,” I said.

“ (*Or supposed to be.*) Is this it ? ” and to my undisguised joy and wonder he drew the identical volume I had almost given up for lost from his pocket.

“ Thanks, thanks,” said I, making a dash at it, but it was only a dash, for Sydney replaced it in its old receptacle, and said —

“ Not so fast. Why do you want it to-night ? O, most devout of thy kind ! dost

think I take the trouble to pick up every tome that I see inadvertently left on tables, to return to their rightful owners, merely for the pleasure of seeing things in their places? You mistake me. I shall render it unto thee all in good time."

"For the love of Heaven, Stapleton," said I, at once amused and vexed, "do be quiet with that nonsense, and give—"

"Good-night, fare ye well, I'm off. I entreat of ye not to try and catch me, for your own sake, as you would unquestionably lose yourself in the labyrinthine corridors."

With these words, much to my annoyance, Sydney left me to myself. Tired with the events of the day, I turned into bed and soon fell fast asleep.

I had already been two days in my new domicile when the messenger brought me four letters, three of which, I rightly construed, came from my kind benefactors, Lady Norton and my lord, one from my kinswomen, and the remaining note addressed to me in an unknown hand. My Lady Norton wrote as follows :—

“I am glad to hear that you are contented with your new position, my dear boy. There is absolutely no news at all, saving that we miss you very much. This tiresome world! Will everything always continue the same? Always the same dull round of monotony, nothing changing save the weather, which is wretched at present, after having been so marvellously fine. At all events, Harold, if things change, I find they change for the worse. Perhaps I think so because I am getting old and cynical. Cynical, ah me! and who shall say that I have not cause to be so?” (Poor woman, the old wound was still open.) “We have been entertaining a pretty set of coxcombs and fools here, but most of them are leaving in a day or two, a mercy for which I am unboundedly grateful to Heaven. The noise of their senseless chatter and clatter annoys me beyond all measure, and I shall be heartily glad to be well rid of them.

“Write soon to

“Your affectionate

“O. NORTON.

“Norton Castle, March. 17—.”

The next, remarkable for its brevity, came from my lord, and ran thus:—

“ DEAR HAL,

“ Only these few lines to tell ye I am about to leave England for a tour with Death, who, by-the-bye, sends his *love*, and may not possibly return before a year or so.

“ I am about to become a wanderer on the face of the earth—a voluntary one—and unless I am dead I shall write to you now and again. My demise you will know of by my not sending any messages.

“ Good-bye, dear boy.

“ Yours, &c.,

“ ALINGDALE.

“ P.S.—Don’t trouble about college fees: all’s arranged,”

“ DEAR COZ,

“ I have such heaps of news to tell you that I do not know how to begin one single item. Let me think now. Soberly, I cannot; my ideas want to rush out of my head down to my pen, and from my pen to the paper pell mell.

“ Annie has been crying, O such a vast

amount of tears. I declare, I believe she has drops in her eyes now, all for you, Mr. Cousin, because you left her. Wicked Theseus that you are! It avails nothing for me to tell her that the beau cousin will come back soon; she mourns still for you! The valley of tears I call her. Do you know I cried too, when you went away, but, dare I confess the truth, I found the tip of my nose became so red, that I had to leave off, or desist, whichever you please, because there's gay company at the castle, and it's no use making a guy of one's self.

“A certain Mr. Chapman has been good enough to pay great attention to me. Not liking his kindnesses, however, I begged him to transfer his affections elsewhere; this he would not do. At last, my lord noticing how unwelcome his favours were to me, told him, of course in other words, to go about his business. With that awful sneer on his face, I declare he looked like some bad spirit, and made me quite afraid of him, afraid, yes, but at the same time I could not help admiring him too.

“He is going away. Tant pis. He has

given me a beautiful pair of earrings, matching the brooch which he gave me when I was quite a little thing; you remember, when I sung, 'Allez vous en,' &c., and you were so angry to find me chanting my poor little melody to the gentlemen. He presented them to me as a remembrance, he said. And so I answered 'that I did not need a souvenir to bring him to my memory, as I could never forget him.' 'Do you really mean that?' he asked, taking my hand and looking at me very earnestly. 'Indeed, my lord,' I replied, wondering, 'I do.' I cannot conjecture what he was about to reply, for just at that moment that vexatious Colonel George (Death) makes his appearance on the scene. Somehow or other he invariably does, when my lord speaks to me." (I blessed the honest Colonel inwardly.)

"I hear that my old playfellow Sydney Stapleton is at college (his father came on a short visit to my dear aunt). I hope you are great friends with him. Pray ask if he remembers Little Allie, of whom he *used* to be so fond. Ask him also if he remembers the times out of number he would take me

out a-walking, and when he would climb up such wonderfully high trees to get me birds' nests, and almost drown himself by falling in the river's swift current to pluck one of those nasty slimy water lilies for me. O, what a naughty little piece of wilfulness I must have been to have worried the poor lad so. But I forget, he is grown up now, and so I must not pity him ; he probably has forgotten even my name.

“ In two more years, dear old coz, I am to be presented at Court. Fancy ! My dear aunt has promised it me ; is not that splendid ? Mistress Almyra Marlande is going to hold her head as high as any of your fine ladies, perhaps higher ; who knows ?

“ I am so enchanted with the glorious prospects that are before me, that I can scarcely write you a sober letter. I cannot help giving a delighted little scream now as I scribble this. Dear old-fashioned Annie is looking at me from her work in astonishment ; yes, the silly child cannot understand my satisfaction with myself, and *everybody*, even though I *do try* my best to explain. I am afraid that *you* cannot either. And shall

I tell you why? 'Tis because you are as old-fashioned, yes, I repeat it, old-fashioned as my charming little quakeress sister there! I cannot refrain from laughing when I think how scandalised and shocked Mr. Probity would be 'if he hears all that I hear, and see all I see!' In the words of Ophelia, a little altered. *Vous voyez, mon beau, that for all my worldliness, I do devote myself, when I've a spare minute, to good literature, but, entre-nous, it's tiresome.* I like reading very well indeed, when nothing else is to be done, when I can't read people, but there are always so many at the castle, that you will, of a certainty, agree with me that—but I forget what I was about to say. I think I have written quite enough confused nonsense to muddle even *your* clever old brains.

“Adieu, with love and kisses (that's to say if you've nothing against 'em).

“ALLIE.”

“P.S.—The Abbé Chatronière sends regards. Annie will write soon; she cannot at present, being prevented from holding her pen by a bad finger.”

The fourth note ran simply thus—

“The learned Society composed of the A.C.’s have decided to receive you in their circle. You are honoured by no ordinary appellation. Henceforth you shall be known in the Assembly as the ‘Saint.’

“By order of the President, Chairman and others,

“Signed, **VALERIAN DE CRESPIGNY.**

“You are requested to attend a meeting which is held to-night.”

The paper fluttered from my hands. Who had told me once that my father had been so called when he was at college? Colonel Death. They say the apple falls not far from the tree. I hope so, O, how sincerely I hope so. From such a noble tree as my father was, I, the poor fruit, was honoured by being near.

* * * * *

It was through Stapleton’s influence that I had come by the doubtful sobriquet. He had told them the story of my Bible, and how he had come upon me unobserved in time to see me laying it down; how I had wept at the thought of having lost it. All

this and much more did Stapleton inform the Ante-Conventionalists in my absence, and so it is I came by the name of "Saint." It cost me not a little, for the outsiders, unconscious why I was so hight, taunted me until I was compelled by physical reasoning to demonstrate I was further from heaven than they imagined. After awhile they commenced to have a different opinion of Saint Steyneville, and so I was molested no more, greatly to my satisfaction. Although I was invariably victorious over my abusers, yet, as someone hath said, even "Toujours perdrix" becomes tiresome at last.

CHAPTER XVIII.

How shall I tell the story of a great friendship, and an ephemeral love—both contracted at college? Noble de Crespigny—sweet Alice Dale! can ever my humble pen do you both justice? By nature I am no hero-worshipper; I cannot kneel in adoration to those I love. A great man has said that a flattering eye sees no faults, but that a friendly one doth. I am no flatterer, nor one who loves to form phantasmagorical views of the greatness that human friendship can be capable. Experience hath shown me that the pure affection between two people, Friendship, is not an obsolete sentiment at which sceptics and cynics sneer. That history repeats itself we know; and so we

shall see again a Damon and Pythias, a Brutus and a Cassius. Even a friendship greater than either of these shall my pages show forth to the patient reader.

Let me commence with my love of Alice Dale. Fresh and pretty as the mountain daisy, thy very ignorance and simplicity were new charms to my wearied eyes—wearied with seeing great worldly men and women. Where art thou now? Hast thou, if living still, quite forgotten the dark-haired undergraduate who spoke of Phyllis and Corydon, love and Latin to thee in a breath? Thou that couldst not understand a syllable of his gibberish. Yes, it must be confessed I was a young fool, in love as I believed with my whole heart. Now I know otherwise. Love indeed! it was nothing more than a desire to have someone to listen to my grandiloquence and verses without interrupting, which this little peasant maiden did, with her wondering eyes fixed on her lover with awe and admiration, not, it must be owned, amazed at the *quality* of the matter he spouted forth, but at the *quantity*!

Perhaps she is married now—to some

hulking boor of a peasant, belike, and, O horror, surrounded by a dozen squalling, hungry brats. Poesy recoils before realism. Nevertheless, though I cannot help thinking with contempt of my choice, it is a pitying contempt for myself, beginning and ending with myself only.

I first met Alice Dale coming from church one Sunday, walking through a little old-fashioned churchyard, where the peaceful dead lay sleeping tranquilly beneath their time-worn darkened stones, whilst the sun was setting, casting a glorious tint on the objects beneath, warming and brightening the cold place. Yes, how beautifully her golden curls sparkled in the light; how clear her light, large eyes, shadowed by long eyelashes, and scarcely any eyebrow, were; how pretty and modest her whole appearance, as she walked along, prayer and hymn books in hand. Presently, as I passed this fair girl, I was tempted to look round at her. As I did this, she, perhaps prompted by a like curiosity, turned her head towards me. Our eyes met! Ye Gods, what strange tremulous joyful palpitations that glance gave me! She

dropped her books. Whether by accident or purposely I cannot tell, but at all events she *did* drop them, and I—picked 'em both up. It was perfectly natural, of course, that I should offer to escort her home. Was it not natural of her to accept? Natural or unnatural, she *did* accept, and thus it was I came, saw, and *was* conquered by the fair Alice Dale.

Since the first night of my arrival, de Crespigny had evinced a great liking to my company, and I, on my part, was only too glad, when I had finished my studies for the next day, to drop into his rooms for a chat. The Ante-Conventionalists meet twice a week in his apartments, and the assembly was as eccentric, convivial, and uproarious as ever. Often when the others had left would I stay behind. I cannot now explain why, but that I felt irresistibly drawn towards the solitary youth who so resembled me. Solitary, I say, because even in the midst of all laughter and gaiety, although often partaking of it, he seemed alone and solitary, unlike the others. Not scornful or contemptuous, only sorrowful; and yet he

hid his strange sadness so well, that not one single person of all his acquaintances suspected or observed it. Perhaps I remarked it because I saw him more than any of the others.

One night, coming in unseen, although I made sufficient noise to make him aware of my approach, I noticed his cheeks were very pale, his hair disordered, and his eyes expressing such an unutterable, grief, that I felt moved and touched in spite of myself.

He started as I laid my hand on his shoulder, and looked up.

“ Dear old fellow ! what is the matter with you ? ” I asked, earnestly.

“ Matter,” he answered, with a sad smile “ matter, nothing ; what should there be the matter with me ? Sit down, I am glad you’ve come in.”

“ But,” I persisted, “ something is the matter. Do you think I am blind ? You are as sad as any mortal can be. If you are unwell write home to your friends, and they—”

“ Home—friends ! ” he echoed, bitterly ; “ you speak to one of home and friends who has neither.”

“ You are, then, like I, an orphan ? ” I asked gently, surprised at his tone.

“ Yes ; my father died three years ago, and left me under the guardianship of a good man, who is — ”

“ Who is — ” I hazarded, as he abruptly left off speaking.

“ Who is dead,” he answered, despairingly, “ as all those whom I loved are. O, Steyneville, Steyneville, you are the only one whom I have ever cared to confide in, and who, I know, will not smile at what I am about to say.”

“ Nay, nay, indeed.”

“ It is true, then,” he pursued, “ that I am a most unfortunate being ; I do not pity myself, and yet, do you know, since ever I was a little lad, all people, all things to which my love has been given, have either died, or gone never to return. You think I speak wildly ; God knows I speak the truth. *I am afraid even to like you as I would*, for I know my love always brings death or misfortune to those I hold dear. ‘ Yes, the sins of the father are visited on the children,’ ” he added, in a lower tone, as if musingly.

“De Crespigny,” I replied, astonished at what he spoke, “if you are suffering mentally, as I believe you to be, if I am truly honoured by your prized friendship, confide in me.”

“Hush—it’s nothing,” he returned, with a laugh of forced gaiety. “I often get these fits on me, but you see, my dark-haired Saint, they do not last long; here I am, as merry as ever.” And to corroborate his statement, he laughed long and heartily.

This is all very well, thought I, but your laugh rings false, and, as I am your friend, I shall find out your secret sorrow, and if I can help you to be rid of it, or bear a portion of it myself, I will.

CHAPTER XIX.

It was a hot July evening, as I sate in my room finishing a paper to be read that same night, for the especial enlightenment and behoof of the A.C.'s. It was so very warm that I was compelled to shed my coat and waistcoat before I could prepare myself to write with any degree of comfort. Phew! the open window did not make the slightest difference to the ardent atmosphere, too ardent to be pleasant (like love), and instead of cooling the temperature, the outside air penetrating my apartment seemed to increase the already intolerable heat.

I had but a few lines more to add to my paper when someone knocked, and straightway walked in without waiting for permission. It was de Crespigny.

“ Hallo ! Steyneville, come along ; the fellows are waiting, and won’t commence without you.”

“ One moment,” said I ; “ I have but two lines more to write, and then I’m at your service.”

“ Very well, I’ll wait,” answered the other, taking a chair exactly opposite.

With extraordinary zeal I applied myself to my manuscript. Finishing the last line I sprung from my seat ; in doing this I had not noticed that the ruffle of my shirt caught in something, a nail, I think, and the violent impetus tore it open, disclosing to view a black ribbon, attached to which was a small likeness of my mother. I always wore this miniature, because it had belonged to my dear father. I myself had found it under his pillow when they had removed his remains, and so I cherished it because of its associations. In vain I tried by a quick movement to conceal the object from Crespigny’s view. My hand might have been quick, but his eyes were quicker, and he begged me to allow him to see the picture, whom he took to be some fair enslaver, no doubt.

“It’s nothing,” said I, blushing, and clasping my hand tightly over my breast.

“If it’s nothing I *must* see it,” he replied, laughing. “Do you want me to call in my minions to assist me? For I’ve sworn within myself that I shall have a peep at *her* picture; she who is capable of turning our Saint’s head. Come,” he continued, gaily, “I shall call Stapleton to my aid, and our combined efforts shall compel ye to show us the beautiful being. Do you know, I’ve a conviction that she must be beautiful; and, as I am an ardent admirer of beauty myself, I—Good God! who is it—who is this?” he asked, hoarsely, staring at the picture with frightened, bewildered looks. For finding it useless to argue more, I had unfastened it from the black ribbond and placed it in his hand.

“Who is it?” I repeated, astonished at the strangeness of his tones and manner.

“Yes, tell me, I repeat, who is it?” he asked, taking hold of my wrist.

“For Heaven’s sake, de Crespigny,” I cried, “not a word more. Here comes someone to fetch us.”

And taking it from his hand, I replaced it

just in time, for at that moment the *Butterfly* entered.

“Upon my word,” he cried, ironically, “this is pleasant; here I find you two fellows looking at each other moon-struck, whilst the rest are impatiently waiting for you. On my soul it’s too bad—positively heartless of you. Here, St. Steyneville, have you been fighting? With a torn shirt, and no jacket or waistcoat, and de Crespigny standing like Hamlet about to spout, ‘To be or not to be.’ Gentlemen, if you can explain yourselves and your position, I shall be delighted, I do assure you.” And with these words Stapleton sat down with a resigned, martyr-like expression.

“Never mind,” said de Crespigny, with a composure that contrasted strangely with his former impetuosity; “Steyneville is ready now, and so we will make our reappearance directly,” which we did, I, in my haste, forgetting the matter (a kind of sermon) which had taken me such trouble to compile. Our entrance was the signal for a universal shout of satisfaction, and the members’ curiosity being satisfied by an explanatory excuse,

the business of the evening commenced. My mind was so wholly wrapped up with the wonderful emotion de Crespigny had exhibited on seeing my mother's picture, that I could not think of anything else. On one point I was resolved, viz., to ask of him, when the rest of the members had dispersed to their respective rooms, an explanation.

Stapleton, with characteristic coolness, commenced a dissertation in refutation of the truth of Shakespeare's line, "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." On his part (Stapleton's) he fully agreed with the *too-highly-eulogised-bard* in stating that a rose by any other name would *smell* as sweet but not *be* as sweet. As an example, he would take the names of the piece in which the fair heroine said the aforementioned words. Call Romeo and Juliet "Tom and Jemima," and the play, to his mind, would lose some of its beauty. Why? because we are used to associate the two vulgar appellations with anything but majesty, lowness, and tragedy. This argument might appear superficial to the deep thinker, but he (Stapleton) considered *all* things beneath the

sun worthy of the greatest and profoundest reflection, cogitation, meditation, etc. (any amount of "tions"). He wished to demonstrate, not how right he (Stapleton) was, but how wrong Shakespeare was to write such an unreasonable line. Again, he had heard from unquestionable authority, that his ingenious friend "the Moth" (Kenneth Twyne), had written an Ode to "Dorinda," for to-night's meeting. Without asking the author to describe the lady of whom, or to whom, he had written, he (Stapleton) well knew that it was a being possessing great personal attractions. This he simply knew by the name. Had the poem been addressed to Maryanna, Jemima, or any other name of questionable prettiness, he (Stapleton) would undoubtedly have thought that the satirical genius of his friend had been at work. So much for there being nothing in a name!

Amid some applause the Butterfly fluttered to his seat. Next came the poem "to Dorinda," by the Moth, which might have been much better and much worse than it was. After the poem, Benedict Hales, otherwise known as the Adder, read a curious tale of

his own, entitled "The Devil and the Man; or, Vice and Virtue," in which vice was depicted as suffering, and virtue glorified, until the end, when things changed to *vice-versa*, the moral being obviously *im-moral*. The opinions on this paper were divided; it was certainly clever, but the spirit of mockery was carried too far, and though some applauded, the greater part of the assembly remained silent regarding the pamphlet's merits.

It was with a positive sigh of relief that I watched the last form retreat, and as I turned to de Crespigny he also seemed anxious to renew the conversation which so abruptly terminated through the inopportune entrance of Stapleton. As we sat down side by side, I could not help noticing how more than handsome his face looked that night. He wore a coat of dark red, or crimson velvet, simply laced, which suited his complexion to perfection. Over his shoulders, screening a part of his face, hung his rich, beautiful hair; his profile, indeed, looked so perfect, that I stared blankly wonderingly at him. He broke the silence by asking me again whom the picture

represented — the picture fastened to a ribbon round my neck !

“Indeed,” said I, embarrassed, “if I do tell you, I can’t think what makes the subject of any importance to you.”

“Believe me,” he answered, earnestly, “it is not idle curiosity that prompts me to question you on a topic upon which I see you would willingly be silent. But it is of *vast* importance to me to know who that woman is ?”

“Of *vast* importance,” I repeated, incredulously, shrugging my shoulders (Heaven forgive me my disbelief). “So be it then. Since the face interests you so, I will tell you whose it is, or was. My mother’s.”

“You speak very coldly of her if she is dead, Steyneville,” said the other gently.

“No more than you did when I spoke to you once of your parents and friends.”

“Ah, well ! I have reason, cruel, cruel reason, to speak coldly of my dead parents,” he replied, in a tone so full of despair that it thrilled me. I felt more interested than ever in this mysterious young fellow as I replied —

“You have reason to speak coldly of both,

and I have cause to speak coldly of, thank Heaven, only one."

"Of her?" he questioned, earnestly, pointing to my breast where was concealed the picture.

"Yes, of her," I replied sadly.

Then there was another silence.

"Tell me, Steynevile, will you make a compact with me?" he asked suddenly.

Somewhat taken aback by the abruptness of the question, I replied —

"If I could I would, only that I should like to know beforehand to *what* I am to engage myself."

"It is this," he replied. "You have often asked me what secret sorrow harasses my mind. This I faithfully promise to reveal to you if you, in your turn, will tell me all about your antecedents, your whole history in fact, in which I feel wonderfully interested."

"My history!" I laughed. "There is no history, I fancy, less romantic than mine; but if you wish to become acquainted with so prosaic a reality I will enlighten you on condition that you tell me yours."

“Certainly, I have promised that ; but first yours, first yours,” he repeated in a kind of trembling expectancy.

And so I commenced from the beginning, telling him about my home, my father, my cousins, and the kindness of Lady Olympia Norton and my Lord Alingdale, of my finding out the conspiracy against my benefactress, until my arrival at Oxford, where I paused to take breath.

“Is that all ?” he asked, disappointedly. “But your mother, you have mentioned no word of her yet. Tell me, tell me, what of her ?”

In my agitation I asked myself why did he look so fixedly at me with his searching eyes as if I had voluntarily cheated him out of something, and he were endeavouring to find the truth.

“She died in my infancy,” I was about to say, when I checked myself in time. It would have been a shameful lie to tell one who was, without doubt, about to disburden his whole heart to me, and so, almost in a whisper, I told him that my mother had

wronged both my father and myself, and hid my face in my hands for very shame and sorrow as I related the story to him.

As the past rose before me, the figure of my dear lost parent, with his melancholy face and kind, generous heart—forgotten by the busy world, himself forgetting it, he who would have made such a noble presence there had it not been for the one whom he had loved, and who in return had spoilt and ruined his lifetime—was once again a living, breathing reality before my eyes. Heaven only knows that I am not of an inexorable character; but there is one injury I cannot pardon, my mother's sin against my father. What, even now I sometimes ask myself, could have induced her to yield to any seductions that a man might offer, with such a one as my father by her side?

For the present, then, I told that shameful history to the young man with a bowed head and a voice that had almost sunk itself into a whisper. Scarcely had I finished its recital than I became aware that my listener, no longer in his accustomed place, had risen

from his seat, not to stand, but to kneel before me !

“ Crespigny,” I exclaimed, confused at his strange proceeding, “ dear Crespigny, why do you kneel, and to me ? What have I said or done.—”

But the sentence was never finished. For the face turned towards me was lighted up with an expression of hope and joy such as I had never seen depicted there before. Those wonderful eyes of his, wonderful in their colour and earnestness, were bent on mine with an all-devouring look, and his hands were clasped to his breast as if in adoration. Recoiling in astonishment, yet seized at the same time with a vague presentiment of something impending, I asked him what he did at my feet.

“ Leave me, O, leave me,” he said brokenly.

“ Nay,” I returned firmly ; “ as I love you, I will not. You are ill and know not what you do. Come, let me assist you to undress.”

“ If it is to put on my shroud I will,” he answered wildly. “ O, my God, have I found but to loose ?—Must my joy be of

such short duration ? I now see that which in my selfishness I forgot. The grief and double shame, if I disclose — but no, leave me, leave me, Steyneville—come to me when I am calmer ; it is only a nervous fit you see,” he said, with a sad attempt at a smile.

But I was by his side in a moment, and putting my arm about his shoulder, besought him not to break his promise to me, namely, that of telling me his history in return for my confidence.

“ Do you really wish me to tell you ? ” he asked earnestly, yet shrinking, I thought, somewhat from my touch. “ It is a very short one.”

“ Never mind, tell me it, and let me, if I can, advise you, being the elder, how best to bear your sorrows, with which I am, as yet, wholly unacquainted. Believe me,” I continued, as earnestly as he had spoken, “ if I could help you—if I can—I will.”

“ Listen, then. I am the son of parents who were never before the altar. I am the son of parents who not only wronged and violated the laws of Heaven, but who

wronged two living people. I am the offspring of a woman who was already married to one ere she left him to live with my father. I curse the hour of my birth and they who caused my eyes to see the light, and—yes, shrink from me, shrink from my blighted touch, leave me, despise me, spurn me from you, for you are my kin, and I must henceforth be the bane of your existence.”

“Who are you? who are you?” I articulated hoarsely, half divining the truth, and far from shrinking now from the poor fellow, held him closer in an already fast embrace.

“As Heaven is above us, as God is a judge between us,” he said solemnly, “I am your bastard half brother.”

CHAPTER XX.

WHAT wonder, now the mystery was out, that I resembled him so much, and that we both had felt irresistibly drawn towards each other from the first? Certainly there is more between heaven and earth than Philosophy ever dreams of, or else what Science can explain the mysterious influence and power which impels us to do that which is necessary for the working out of that which some of us denominate Fate, or Destiny. Destiny or no destiny, fate or no fate, I was as surprised as pleased to find my new kinsman, and did all that lay in my power in the shape of persuasives to induce him to be more reconciled to his parentage. But his was a heart so upright in its dealings,

combined to a mind so clear in its judgment, that my arguments would avail nothing, and save for the affection he bore me (and I him), he was the same as ever. We agreed that our secret should live and die with us, and that none should ever be acquainted with our relationship.

He told me that in two years he would succeed to his father's personal estate, being only nineteen at the time, though looking considerably older. He had remained in ignorance of the facts concerning his birth until the age of sixteen, when his father confessed his sin to him on his dying bed. The lad, on his part, had, somewhat cruelly I thought, refused to grant the forgiveness for which his parent had prayed.

* * * * *

I had won my degrees, and in a month was prepared to bid farewell to Oxford for ever. Not without a kind of regret, too, for I had spent many a happy hour within the old walls, besides *out* of them, by the side of the fair Alice Dale, whose fondness for me was only equalled by her patience. Patience I say, because it requires a mortal who

possess no ordinary amount of that virtue to listen graciously to the grandiloquence of a science-stuffed youth. But of late, it must be confessed, I had grown more reticent in my love-making, and though I loved—or thought I did—this young peasant maiden, it just occurred to me that some unpleasant consequences might arise from our intimacy, platonic and pure though it was. Two days before my departure I received the following from my half-brother, de Crespigny, handed to me by an extraordinarily dusty-looking individual :—

“ DEAR HAROLD,

“ Doubtless this letter will cause you some surprise when you see from whom it comes, and where. But I am now on my way to London, having been called away suddenly yesterday forenoon by a message from my lawyer, who says I must be present (and that immediately) at some legal transaction which requires my presence and signature. I was unable to bid ye good-bye, old fellow, for when I was arrayed in my travelling gear I found you were attending some lecture, and could not be disturbed, wise-

acre that you are. I am writing this in an inn—an execrable inn, where they serve you with bad ale, bad food, bad everything, in fact. Everything say I, well, not everything, for there's a pretty, bright-eyed damsel in the bar-room, who makes up, I daresay, for that which is wanting in the alimentary line. I have been watching her for the last quarter of an hour. She is surrounded by some country bumpkins, whose attempts to compliment the young creature on her good looks are as grotesque and heavy as their respective appearances. Ye Gods ! to listen to 'em, after all the learned lectures I've passed through ! It's like listening to the babble of a mountain stream after hearing the mighty noise of a cataract dinning in one's ears day after day. It's quite rural, refreshing and rustic ; no Latin or Greek quotations from those arrant old humbugs, Horace, Ovid, etc., being surreptitiously foisted into the conversation. The fair being is actually blushing beneath the volley of her admirers' fire. Happy girl ! Thrice blessed mortal ! May'st thou never have more cause to blush than now !

“ But joking apart, Hal, I am sincerely sorry not to have seen you before I left, for Heaven only knows when or where we shall meet again ! You are leaving college in two days, I know ; and perhaps I shall never go back, for all the old fellows have gone or are going.

“ O, Harold, Harold, if you only knew how I have grown to love you, my brother, in those two years, you would understand how hard I think it is to leave you.

“ If I remain in England I will see you at Norton Castle !

“ Being a ward in Chancery, I cannot tell yet how the Lord Chancellor intends to dispose of my person. I suppose I shall travel, like the rest of the members of the so-called polite society. The more worldly and heartless a man is, the more well-bred and genteel he’s considered to be. We poor Ante-conventionalists would have a hard time of it if we wished to propagate our views and opinions *outside* the college walls !

“ But the coach that is to convey me to my destination is waiting impatiently for me.

“ So good-bye, God bless you, my dear fellow.

“ Yours ever,

“ V. DE CRESPIGNY.”

So he was gone, too. Stapleton, “ the Butterfly,” Benedict Hales, “ the Adder,” and Kenneth Twyne, “ the Moth,” had left together some months ago. The chiefs of the merry band were separated, the society had dissolved, and I alone was left, a solitary remnant of glory past.

CHAPTER XXI.

FILLED with expectations of the most delightful kind, and my pulse and heart beating with a fevered excitement, I entered the courtyard of Norton Castle at dusk, three days after the preceding. Being admitted by Hilbert, whose kind old eyes filled with joyful tears at the sight of me (at least so he said), I was shown to my room, where I performed such ablutions and changes as were necessary after a day's travel along dusty roads.

Having bidden the old servant not to acquaint my lady of my arrival, intending to surprise her myself, I hastened to the room indicated by Hilbert, where, knocking at the door and receiving permission to enter, did so.

There were but three people in the room. My lady, looking extremely well, was seated with a book, which she put down on my entrance; the Abbé, and a young lady soberly clad, with great gentle, sweet eyes, whom I had no difficulty in recognising as Mistress Annie Marlande. I walked straight to where my lady sate, and kneeling, took her white hand and kissed it. She, in her turn, drew her hand away with a gesture of surprise. She had not recognised me. The Abbé meanwhile looked on me with no less amazement.

“Ah, Madame,” said I sadly, in French, “have you quite forgotten me?”

“Who is it?” asked my lady. “Can—”

“O, aunt! Can’t you see who it is? It is Harold,” exclaimed Miss Annie, with a sob, and running to me in the old kind fashion, she put her arms about my neck and kissed me, like the dear sweet girl she was.

“Mon Dieu, c’est lui!” gasped the Abbé, gazing at me with open mouth and eyes.

“Mon garçon, mon brave, beau garçon,” cried my lady heartily. “Heaven forgive

me for thus welcoming thee; but how should I recognise thee, since thou hast grown so wondrous tall."

"And so hand—" began Annie.

"Hush!" laughed my lady, with tears in her eyes. "We will not make him vain, niece, because—Méchant—is this what thou hast learned at college?"

This! was a kiss which I permitted myself to give my kind benefactress on the cheek, blushing very much as I did so.

"Erubuit, salva res est!" exclaimed the little divine, seizing my hands in his, and shaking them with great warmth of manner.

"No more, please, l'Abbé," said my lady. "Hath not the poor lad had enough of it? Let your wisdom be tempered with mercy."

"I beg your pardon, dear aunt," said Annie, gently, "but hath my cousin had no refreshment?" turning to me.

"I have forgotten it. Indeed, I am not hungry, having but two hours ago had something to eat. But where—where is Allie?"

Scarcely had the words passed my lips, when the door was opened, and a tall, beautiful girl entered, leading a great dog by a

chain. This apparition, which made me recoil with astonishment, was followed by two gentlemen—Colonel Death and my Lord Alingdale, the latter somewhat changed and darker of complexion.

Almyra Marlande was now about eighteen years of age. Her figure, above the ordinary height, possessed all those graces and perfections that were at once fascinating and commanding. Super-added to this was a face of extraordinary perfection of feature—as extraordinary in its regularity as in its rarity. Her hair, which had darkened considerably, hung in undulating masses below her waist, of a perfectly natural size, and unlike the nipped and pinched fashion of the day. Her eyes, like her sister's, were large, and of a deep grey colour; but surmounted and shaded as they were by long, black eyelashes, appeared infinitely darker and larger. Unlike those of her sister, they flashed and scintillated with all those varying passions and moods which the brilliant, worldly girl was capable of showing. Her nose and mouth, as faultless in their chiselling as the other traits of her remarkable

face, were studies in themselves ; not classic, not merely pretty, but strangely and most originally beautiful—types of themselves, with a good-humoured and half-contemptuous expression, marked by a slight elevation of the eyebrows, and a slight downward curving of the lips, wholly consistent with the bold, free bearing of the girl. When I say bold, I do not mean to imply that coarse forwardness so often associated with an absolute absence of reserve, but a perfectly natural, fearless manner, that was at once the cause of wonder and admiration—in form and feature a rare woman, and to which one would be more disposed to compare than deem comparable. Dressed in a light material, which suited her (as I am sure anything would) admirably, and with her long train caught hastily in the other hand, the folds of which hung in graceful, statuesque folds, Almyra Marlande presented herself, like a Diana newly-returned from the hunt.

With greater kindness and cordiality than I had expected, miss embraced me, and declared her great pleasure in seeing her kinsman again, and teased me about my looks.

Colonel Death and my lord also appeared glad, and congratulated me for having studied so well as to graduate and receive honours.

When we had all sat down comfortably, as in old times, my lord informed me that he had arrived from his tour, with the Colonel, only a few days before.

“Yes, Hally; and was it not good of my lord to bring me such a pretty present?” interrupted Almyra, pointing to her dog, a beautiful St. Bernard.

“Ay, very kind indeed,” said I, glancing up abstractedly, and meeting the eyes of the Colonel as I did so.

There was something in his look that thrilled me. Truly the happiness of man is of short duration. A minute before I could have almost said that my happiness was perfect; but now a glance had destroyed my joy. Was it jealousy? Perhaps it was. Yes, I am sure it was; for as the picture of Alice Dale rose before me, glancing at my cousin, I knew it dwindled away to thin air in comparison, and the image of Almyra filled the vacant spot.

I was seated between my lady and the Abbé, who seemed absorbed in visionary contemplation of the ceiling, quite unusual to him. Ashamed of the unworthy sentiment, and struggling hard to free myself of the green-eyed monster who wished to take possession of my heart, I feigned an interest I was far from feeling in the animal, and asked his name.

“Antony, Marc Antony,” returned Almyra, patting his head. “And you love me, don’t you, boy?” she asked, addressing the animal.

The dog, in reply, put his head upon his mistress’s lap, and replied with his eyes, “More than my life.”

“Now,” continued Almyra, still speaking to him, “if I were to cry, what would *you* do? O dear, O, O, O—what shall I do?” And hiding her face in her hands, gave free vent to a well-feigned cry of distress.

Antony, seeing his mistress in sorrow, raised his head, and began such an unearthly howling that made some of us stop our ears, and compelled Almyra to cease her pretence and assume a joyful expression, at which the

dog, to demonstrate his exquisite delight, yelped and gambolled about and around his mistress like a young elephant at play.

“Now, Antony, dear old boy,” she said, speaking with her forefinger raised, and in mock gravity, “if someone were to hit me like this”—giving herself a smart slap—“what would you say, eh ?”

The creature gave a warning growl, and looked around at the assembled company with a look that seemed to imply, “I’m not vicious by nature, mind you; but, by Jove ! I’ll eat any man alive who attempts to touch *her*.”

What wonder, then, that men loved the beautiful Miss Marlande if the very dog adored her ! I forget; sometimes men act in a way that an honest dog would be ashamed of.

“Miss Allie,” said my lord, “you have taught that dog in a fashion highly creditable to your good taste.”

“Indeed, my lord,” returned miss, with a curtsey, half-mocking, half-earnest “*is* it possible that I could *teach* even Antony to learn love ? Cousin Harold, pray did you

pass in honours for love, amongst other sciences ? I suppose you call it ‘amorology’ at College. Will you teach it me ?”

“ With the greatest pleasure in life,” returned the young lady’s kinsman, with alacrity. “ Shall we begin now ?”

“ Nay,” laughed Almyra ; “ that is a little too soon. What think you, dear aunt ?” And she ran to her benefactress, and, kneeling down by her side, kissed her.

Annie, by the side of the Abbé, looked with smiling lips and sad eyes on the scene. The Colonel and my lord seemed amused.

“ By-the-bye, Hal,” said my lord, breaking into a new channel, “ is it true what I heard from young Stapleton, that they *canonized* you at College, as I predicted ?”

The Abbé woke from his reverie at the word “ canonized,” and, crossing himself, gazed at the “ moqueur,” as he called my lord, with a countenance expressive of lively dread—dread that the next syllable, phrase, or sentence uttered by the nobleman would be profane.

“ They used to call me Saint.” I said, reluctantly ; “ but I can assure you I believe

no one is less deserving of the *honour*, my lord."

"Saint," laughed Almyra. "Saint Harold, let me worship at thy shrine."

"I will if thou'l be wholly mine," sang Colonel Death, adopting a then popular song for the occasion, assuming at the same time a lachrymal expression supposed to be peculiar to saints only, and with his head twisted sideways and hands most appropriately folded.

"Ha!" exclaimed my lord, laughingly, "can Death be a wag and a saint at one and the same time? Say, Abbé, you appear as if you knew all about it."

"I—Heaven forbid!" returned the divine, hastily. "Judge not by the appearances, milord; they are deceptive all ways. Saith an adage well-known—in this case there is no deception—I veut dire—exception."

"Never mind, M. l'Abbé," said the moqueur's kinswoman; "we will not cavil about theological questions just now. My lord, be silent; I want to speak of something important. Now he has returned from College, when shall Harold join his

regiment ? He will pardon me, I know, for mentioning his departure again so soon after his arrival, for thou knowest I wish thee but well."

I knew it, and kissed in my gratitude the dear hand of the lady.

"Madam," interposed Colonel Death "he shall join his regiment in a month's time, dating from yesterday ; and I vow, ere long, we'll make a general of him."

With this emphatic declaration, the Colonel rapped his snuff-box, and taking a hearty pinch, passed it round to Lord Alingdale, who laughingly presented it to Almyra.

"Thank you, my lord," returned that young lady, candidly. "I don't intend to make a dust hole of *my* nose, if others do."

"O, Allie!" said Annie, with a gentle reproach.

"There ! I can't say a single word without being snubbed. 'Tis too bad, is it not, M. l'Abbé. O, Allie ! what have I said ? Anything atrociously wicked ? Then whip me, and look out," said the girl, merrily, "for the consequences, while Antony is near."

"Come, come," said my lady, "no harm's

done, and the fealty of your favourite there, niece, will not be tried. Colonel, you promised to tell us something of your travels to-night. I am sure Harold, too, unless he feels fatigued, will hear them with the same pleasure as we poor women, who have not been so far nor heard so much," with cynical good humour.

"O, yes, Colonel George, tell us, please," cried Almyra; "something interesting; don't describe any scenery, because it's so *fade*. I hate to be told anything about the babble of streams, theplash of the Niagara Falls, nor about mountains, deserts, and plains, etc., or — "

"In Heaven's name, Miss Allie, what am I to tell you about?" cries the poor Colonel, helplessly, "if not about things you have already mentioned?"

"Easy enough," says miss, coolly; "have you not met any men, women, for instance, on your travels worthy of — "

"Stay, pardon me," said the soldier, with a queer laugh, "I have thought of *someone*; one of many whom I might tell you about, if my lord will permit me."

“Lady or gentleman?” questioned miss, with a pretty lifting up of the eyebrows.

“*Lady!*” emphasised the Colonel, glancing at my lord openly, and on me covertly.

“Tell it, pray,” cried Almyra, eagerly. “I know aunt would like to hear it, wouldn’t you, darling? and I am sure Annie is dying to know, too, only the little slyboots doesn’t show it.”

“Very well, then, anything to please you. ’Tis, then, about a certain fair creature called Madelone. A Moorish girl.”

“Fair and *Moorish?*” cried Almyra, with a look in the glass that seemed to say, “Not fairer than I, surely.”

“Nay, nay, that’s just where it is,” replied the wily soldier-politician. “I cannot help wondering at Alingdale’s taste, after he had seen, never mind whom. But as I was saying, this Madelone — ”

“Can’t you be quiet, Death?” expostulated my lord, with a slight frown.

“Not a bit of it. I have a habit—a peculiarly bad one if you wish—but, be it as it may, a habit of finishing all I have begun. Madalone was a gloriously dark girl — ”

My lord began to whistle.

“And,” continued the imperturbable Colonel, noticing the impression he had made on one of his listeners at least, “my lord met her —she was selling water at the time, I believe, and in her own native country ; judging by the scarcity of the cleansing fluid, a very dirty native country, too. But that’s neither here nor there. Madelone had lovely coal-black eyes, and my lord had a fine fiery heart, and the coals being thrown on the fire — ”

The Colonel paused. The Abbé, with a pious ejaculation, gathered his skirts about his fat little body, and vanished precipitately.

This interruption, slight as it was, had the desired effect. The story was never concluded, no single person regretting it. As it was, there remained enough for the philosophic mind to conclude the worst.

My lady and Annie rose to bid good-night, the latter with flaming cheeks and downcast eyes. Almyra preferred to remain ; she was not tired, and if the gentlemen would not be disturbed by her presence, she would rather stay where she was for a while longer.

The two ladies then left the room, and Hilbert appeared almost immediately afterwards bearing a tray of bottles and glasses jingling in a most delightful manner. Setting his burden down and placing a glass before each of us, Almyra included, he bowed and departed without another word. As my fair kinswoman expressed it, like "an extraordinary silent ghost."

"A toast, come," cried the merry Colonel, winking at me and pouring out the rich red wine with a liberal hand, "my lord will give us one—hey, Alingdale! Come!"

"Since you know so much of my private affairs," said the other with that peculiar, half-sneering smile entirely his own, "perhaps you'll give a toast for me, Death."

"I must beg leave to decline the honour. Perhaps our mutual friend, Steynevile, will oblige?"

"Indeed, not I," I laughed. "Permit me in my turn to pass the question to you, cousin?" I said, turning to her.

"Anything to please you," she replied, half mockingly. "Let us sip to the memory of—"

“Of what?” asked the Colonel, holding his glass to his lips in expectation.

“To the memory of my lord’s heart!” cried the girl and taking a tiny sip, she let the goblet drop from her hands. It fell upon the ground and broke into a thousand pieces, the wine staining the cloth and her light dress.

“Careless of me, is it not? I wonder who will have more to answer for—I on earth for doing this mischief—or my lord in heaven for his works. I find this spilt wine and broken glass quite allegorical. The broken glass might be my lord’s heart—the wine that stains this fine carpet his love. Don’t you think so, Colonel George?” she added with a smile.

“Faith, missie,” said that bluff personage, evidently as astonished as myself at her remarks, “there’s a great deal of truth in what you say!”

“Ay?” asked my lord, cynically, as if he were one the least interested in the conversation. “But come, Miss Allie, don’t let us quarrel,” he said gaily—miss tossed her head—“for I’ve a toast to drink too—Mistress Allie, fair and clever, eh? Ha! ha!”

“ My lord, you do me infinite honour. Cousin Harold,” she asked proudly, “ will you do me the favour to light me down the staircase. I see gentlemen in their cups have very little respect for — ”

“ In their hic-coughs, you mean, miss,” said the Colonel, taking the proffered hand and kissing it affectionately. “ Good night.” The honest soldier loved and honoured this fair girl as if she had been his daughter.

But my lord would not agree to Allie’s proposition concerning my lighting her down the dark staircase, and seizing a taper, he declared it to be his firm intention of accompanying Almyra himself, or perish in the attempt—all with marvellous good humour.

When at length miss consented to the nobleman’s entreaties and both left the apartment, my kinswoman perfectly reconciled to her fate (if such it could be called), the Colonel turned to me, and said in a whisper these remarkable words —

“ Don’t be afraid ; it’s nothing. But if you have no objection, young’un, I’ll visit you in your own room to-night.”

CHAPTER XXII.

IT was past one o'clock when we separated, and I had scarcely unfastened the buttons of my coat preparatory to taking it off when Colonel Death, true to his promise, entered my room—the same one that I had tenanted years ago when I first made my appearance at Norton Castle. It was much the same as ever, and save that to my utter astonishment and delight to find a picture done in water colours of my dear father on the mantel-piece, everything was unchanged. Imagining it to be some kindly thought of my lady, I determined to thank her the next morning for it. Meanwhile the Colonel had literally *plumped* on my bed and paused to take breath; for though like his former self

in all other respects, he had grown a little more corpulent.

“Now,” said I, taking a chair, and seating myself near him, “what is there of such importance you have to tell me? I know it is important, or else, Colonel —”

“I never told you I was going to say anything particular,” he interrupted.

“No, but your eye did,” I answered, smiling.

“By Jove, young’un, I forget quite if it did. But, by-the-bye, you don’t mind my addressing you like that, do you?” he asked simply; “I’m an old soldier, ye know, and don’t stand much on ceremonies.”

Having assured him I rather liked to be dubbed “young’un” than otherwise, he went on to explain the cause of his visit. “Mind you,” he said earnestly, pursing up his lips as was his wont, “I won’t tell you before you promise me faithfully that you’ll not flare up, get into a rage, or any other ridiculous thing—otherwise I swear I shan’t tell you.”

Promising him rather impatiently that I intended to take matters, whatever they were, in an *uncombustible* manner, he asked me if

I could guess of what or whom he was about to speak.

“Of my kinswoman?” said I.

“Anyone else?” he hazarded, looking at me askew.

“Not—not my lord?” I gasped, staring at him with a quaking heart.

“Yes, of Alingdale,” he returned, sadly. “What,” he asked, placing his great hand gently on my shoulder, “poor lad, art thou too smitten with her? Take heed; the root of thy love is but young in thy heart as yet, and thou mayst destroy it ere it gets strength and power to torment thee.”

Young in my heart! Young! it seemed now as if I had known but that love for years. Ill weeds and love grow apace.

“You mistake me,” I stammered; “pray tell me what you have to say of Almyra and—and—” Dear, dear, how hard that name was to pronounce, in the same breath as the other.

“Alingdale,” he said. “Had I not better tell it you to-morrow, for on my faith it is nothing. Besides, you look fatigued!”

“No; now, now, I am not tired; tell me now,” I asked eagerly.

“Well, since you will have it, I am at your service. I warn you beforehand that I am not good at explaining matters and telling tales. To begin with,” he said, abruptly, “do you know why Alingdale went on the tour, and who made him go—”

“No.”

“Well, I made him go, so he shouldn’t see so much of Miss Allie.”

I started as if I had been shot.

“Yes, and between you and me, my lad,” he continued, feigning not to notice my wincing, “I think I managed very well.”

“But,” said I, “you surely do not believe that my lord, knowing her from a child, and, I think, still considering her as such—”

“Believe or not believe,” interrupts the Colonel, bluntly, “I don’t think miss is a baby at nineteen, mind you. I’ve a great liking for her ever since that night when she gave me all those jewels, thinking I was so very poor. Do you remember? Well, ever since that time I vow I’d rather have my right hand cut off than any harm should come to her, as

I think there would if that devil, Alingdale, were always dancing near in attendance on her."

It must not be thought that the Colonel disliked my lord, for on the contrary he entertained the liveliest regard for him.

"As he is not the sort of man I should like to see about my daughter had it pleased Heaven to send me one," he added, with a sigh, "I have always kept strict watch on 'em both. Just after you left for college, a young fellow, Chapman, as rich and honest as you could wish, began to make love to your cousin. She seemed pleased enough, in her way you know, making him a regular fetch-and-carry spaniel, and patting him now and then for his indefatigable patience, and I think would have accepted him at last. But then straightway my lord comes from White's with a sneer and a smile on his face at the same time, and begins to run poor Chapman down to Miss Allie, not backbiting him, you know, but making fun of him. Miss, as I expected, listened. I happened to be in the same room one day with the young lady after she had had a quarrel with the young fellow,

over nothing I can assure you, Hal, and her fault entirely.

“Presently,” continued the Colonel, “in walks the lover with an enormous bouquet in his hand, and, not noticing me, stalks to Mistress Allie, kneels, and begging to be forgiven, presents her with the flowers. That she had been a pupil of Alingdale’s one could see immediately, for on this, instead of saying ‘Never mind, I was to blame as well,’ or something to that effect, she rises from her chair as haughty as only she can be, and bids him begone and not come near her any more. This was devilish hard treatment, and so I told her at the time, and the poor young chap, loving her as he did for all that, seeing me, begged me to intercede for him, almost sobbing in his passionate affection for the cruel girl, who, I swear,” cried the Colonel, warming with his subject, “wasn’t worthy of it. Deaf to all entreaties and to all appeals she remained firm in her heartlessness, and so Chapman left her, crying like a baby as he went. Would you believe it that I can’t help admiring her still for all that?” demanded the Colonel in conclusion, naively.

“She wrote to me,” I said, “that Lord Alingdale interfered in the case of a certain Mr. Chapman, whose addresses were obnoxious to her.”

“Faith, man! *that was the brother*, not the one I’m speaking of,” he returned, taking a large pinch of snuff, and looking at me slyly.

“Is that all the evidence you have, Colonel Death, of associating the young girl with a man almost twice her age?”

“Ay—almost, not *quite*; he’s about thirty-five I should say.”

“And in six more years, comparatively speaking, will be an old man,” I resumed, thoughtfully.

“Six more years!” exclaimed the Colonel, stopping in his amazement to put another pinch to its destination. “Gad, you drive very fast; a lot may happen in so many years, I can tell ye. Besides, speaking of evidence, I fancy I could give you more than you cared to hear. Why, bless you, times out of number I have interrupted ‘em, and pretended to come in unawares, when all the while I’ve been prowling about like an old

hound on the track. I don't like it, to tell the plain honest truth, for it seems like adopting that d—d old hypocrite Loyola's motto. Something about not caring for the means for the effect."

"What does my lady say? Does she not see—" I began.

"See!" echoed the other; "do you think now, supposing even if she did *see* anything as you call it, and were disposed to censure miss, that that fair diplomat couldn't settle it, and make matters all right with a kiss? Now, I wish to call your attention to these simple facts. My Lord Alingdale is not a marrying man, and judging by his reputation, not a very scrupulous one either, where the lovely sex are concerned, I mean. Not that I believe he would behave as he usually does in this particular instance, for I'm now rather inclined to be biased by your opinions, that he and they all, my lady included, look upon missie as little more than a child. If they don't, they spoil her as such," he added, simply.

"And you?"

"O, I do as others do," he replied, "as

a matter of course. Perhaps you will think I have mixed myself too much in a matter that does not concern me, Hal, and that I have made a mountain of a molehill. But remember this, there is very little bad afoot in this world that will not grow considerably worse, if 'tis not stopped in time."

I thanked him earnestly, perhaps too earnestly, to be entirely disinterested, but I meant it to be true, and had no thought of self, at the time at all events, although I must confess afterwards the thought occurred to me that the honest Colonel regarded me with some suspicion.

Then the kind gentleman left me to my slumbers, which were of a very restless kind, being continually haunted by a dream which represented Mistress Almyra Marlande eloping with my lord and the unfortunate, jilted Mr. Chapman at the same time, in a chaise with a dozen spirited horses, and I in hot pursuit on a broken-down nag.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“BY-THE-BYE, Alingdale,” remarked the Colonel, the next day when we were all seated at dinner, “what the deu—I beg your pardon, I’m sure,” he said turning to the ladies, “the slip of my tongue was—”

“O, it’s of no consequence, Colonel George,” laughingly said Almyra, who was seated between my lord and myself, “I for one will excuse you. Auntie, dear,” she cried, appealing to my lady, “the Colonel may say ‘deuce’ if he likes, mayn’t he?”

“I’ve nothing against it, I’m sure,” said the lady addressed, good-humouredly; “but Annie and M. l’Abbé—”

“Yes, I forget them, and then there’s

cousin, too, who, coming from college, will be quite shocked," continued the girl, with a comical look. "Of course, it's my usual luck, I can't say a single word without scandalizing somebody. Look at Anne! she's got as red as my rose, and when M. l'Abbé's eyes will come down to their proper places heaven only knows. Dear, oh dear, but I've interrupted you, Colonel George; please go on."

"I declare I forget what I was about to say," returned that gentleman, laughing.

"You know something concerning my lord," suggested Allie, wickedly, "perhaps about Miss Madelone, wasn't that her name, her of whom you spoke yesterday?"

"Ah! ah! yes," replied the soldier, "I recollect now. No, it's nothing to do with her. I was going to ask you, Alingdale, what on earth induced you to go abroad so early this morning? I can assign no reason for it, unless"—here he paused with an arch smile, but I noticed he looked furtively at my kinswoman, who was all attention, and had even laid down her knife and fork to lose no word of the conversation.

My Lord Alingdale shrugged his shoulders with a deprecating smile.

“O, you slyboots,” continued his friend, shaking his forefinger at him, “didn’t I see you leave the Castle at six o’clock this morning—you, who never rise till midday, or almost that, at any rate. By Jupiter!” he said, emphatically, “the young lady that can make my lord perform such wonders must be a wonder herself, and no mistake. Is it the innkeeper’s pretty daughter Blanche? or parson Turner’s niece? There’s a good deal too much quakerism about her to my idea, but there’s no accounting for taste, and so if you’ve chosen either of these fair damsels for your early adoration, why, I commend your good fortune, that’s all.”

“Death, what an ass you are!” cried my lord, somewhat peevishly. “Can’t I stir out without being thought to dance attendance on some one or other?”

“At that time in the day? And you? Certainly not!” said the other, decided. “Come, now, say you were *not* ‘dancing attendance,’ as you call it, what were you doing, or about to do?”

My lord shifted uneasily in his chair, and tapped the ground impatiently with his foot. At last he said —

“ You need not trouble to catechise me further ; I refuse to tell you.”

“ Very well,” returned the Colonel, in a tone of moral certainty ; “ you refuse to say what you were about to do, *or* see, *or* work. Good ; then what I deduce for this is — ”

“ Deduce what you will, and leave me alone,” replied my lord, testily.

“ Il y a beacoup de ‘ deuces,’ ” remarked the Abbé, who had hitherto eaten in silence, “ dans cette conversation là. Of what does it agitate itself ? ”

“ Only my lord up to his usual pranks again, Abbé,” cried the Colonel, with irresistible good humour. “ This morning, think only, at six o’clock, he rises, mounts his horse, and goes to meet his beloved.”

I noticed that Hilbert behaved strangely during the Colonel’s banter. Once I felt certain he was about to speak, when my lord raised his eyes and shook his head at him. Then I felt certain that the old servant only held his tongue by a great effort.

Long after it transpired that the nobleman had that morning been on a visit to his family, bringing them money, of which they greatly stood in need, through the extravagance of the eldest son. But the truth was only known long, long after the act.

If the Colonel's object of telling the story was to anger the haughty Almyra's heart against his friend, his wish was certainly attained, for when the young lady left the room she swept past my lord, who held the door, with her head high, and such an expression of scorn that, as the Colonel said, "Aling-dale himself could not have surpassed it." Two glowing red spots burnt on her cheeks, and her eyes sparkled with a wonderful brightness. Ah, yes, she was growing a woman, I said to myself with a sigh, whilst a pang shot through my heart. A woman who was capable (but what one is not?) of jealousy, passion, and love.

"Ha! ha! ha!" chuckled the Colonel over his wine, thinking of his late triumph.

"Hr-r-r-r-r," snored the Abbé in his chair, making a most unspellable noise through his olfactory organ.

Puff! puff! puff! smoked my lord, his handsome face appearing through the cloud of smoke like that of the geni in the fairy tale.

And I remained silent and thoughtful for some time, during which my lord left the room, and the Colonel followed the Abbé's lively example of falling asleep. Recollecting the evening might be spent in a pleasanter way, and having a grateful duty to discharge, namely, that of thanking my lady for my dear father's picture, I hastened to them, and found them engaged in a kind of what seemed to me, play, curious in the extreme. The chief actors were my lady and Almyra; the former was seated on a raised chair, and Almyra making a grand curtsey, took her hand and kissed it.

“Bravo!” cried my lord, approvingly, “that's a decided improvement on the last one, Miss Allie.”

“Indeed!” cries miss, sneeringly, with a heightening of the beautiful brows; “how happy I am to have won your approbation, my lord!”

“May I ask,” said I, turning to my kind mistress, “what this new game is called?”

“ It is called the presentation,” replied the lady, smiling. “ Now, are you any wiser?”

“ Nay,” I replied, smiling, “ I’m not; is it a secret?”

“ O, no, cousin,” interposed Allie; “ the day after to-morrow I’m to be presented to her Most Serene and Gracious Majesty Queen Anne, and her most noble consort Prince George of Denmark. I’m practising now, because, *entre nous*, it won’t do to be awkward. I have no mind, certainly,” said the young lady, proudly, “ to be laughed at.”

“ Laughed at!” I exclaimed, with involuntary astonishment—“ *you*, cousin?”

“ O, you courtier, you,” laughed the girl, shaking a forefinger at me merrily, “ and so solemn with it, too! isn’t he, auntie dear, just for the world *as if he meant it.*”

“ And so I do mean it,” I returned, honestly.

“ O, cousin, cousin, what a blessed saint you are,” says miss. “ What a delightful world ours would be if everyone meant only half they said, and said only half they meant.”

“ I beg leave to disagree with you,” said my lady’s kinsman, indolently; “ this world

would be a most savage place if men said whatever they thought. No, no ; we will not be savages—we are civilized—and liars. For you must know first that Civilization and Truth are enemies who never agree ! ”

“ I do not follow you, my lord,” cried Allie; “ of course you know better than a poor unsophisticated girl, but if civilization is falsehood, which I doubt, I far prefer it to being a truthful barbarian, painted all over with hideous dyes, and clothed in skins and feathers. Fancy our Saint,” said the girl, merrily, “ in war-paint, brandishing a tomahawk over his head, and executing a war-dance, and uttering wild whoops.”

Annie, my lady, and her kinsman all laughed at this, but though I smiled my heart was much disturbed. My dying father had made me guardian of my two cousins. Was I fulfilling the holy trust imposed upon me ? Was it right that this fair, portionless girl should take a place in the world where “ money, family connections,” are more estimated than virtue or beauty ? Virtue is very agreeable with so many thousands a year—beauty, with so many hundreds—but to have no hundreds !

—and of no particular family! Perhaps my pride revolted somewhat, too, with the thought of being so indebted to anyone, even to my dear kind Lady Norton. How could I alter it? Although my two kins-women were now old enough to make Steyneville a home again, could I even attempt to coop the brilliant Almyra in so dark a cage? The gay world was her element, and she who became it so well would pine in the dull domains of the old place which I loved for its associations; and so I gave up the idea of a change, with a sigh, and became aware of a somewhat startling incident.

My lady, sitting as her majesty, had asked my lord to represent her royal consort. This that nobleman did with a smile. Almyra, approaching to the foot of the mimic throne, bent. My lady, raising her, kissed her. Then Almyra curtsied to the prince (my lord). He taking her hand and raising her, performed the same salutation on her fairy cheek with his lips. Almyra, her face and neck dyed crimson with anger, stamped her foot, and was about to hasten from the room in great

heat ; nor could I blame her, but to this my lord would not consent. Hurrying after her, and anticipating her desire, he planted his back against the door and stood firmly against it.

“ How dare you ? Let me pass, I tell you, let me go ! ” she cried now, white with passion, and stamping her foot imperiously on the ground.

“ I beg your pardon—indeed I do ! ” said the other, with mock humility ; “ I really did not know you would be so angry—besides it was too tempting.”

“ You treat me like a child,” replied my cousin, sobbing ; “ I do not know what I have done to merit this utter disrespect ”—my lord stared ; the truth was dawning upon him at last—she was no more a child, and I think the knowledge did not displease him—“ if you have none for my sex in general, like the ladies of whom Colonel George spoke—”

“ D—n Colonel George ! ” muttered the for once astonished gentleman.

“ At least,” continued the proud Miss Marlande, with a tear of anger in each eye, mak-

ing her even more beautiful ; “ have a little respect for one who has never given you cause to behave otherwise than an honourable man should behave to a woman. Yes, my lord, a woman : although, no doubt, unlike the strange ones of your acquaintance. Let me pass, I tell you, my lord ! ”

And once more that night she passed him with a look of angry scorn. But Heaven only knows the true sentiments of that strange heart. For myself, I believe that her indignation was more aroused by that which the Colonel had said than any real rancour stirred by the kiss.

About my father’s portrait I soon learned the truth. My lady, when I expressed my heartfelt gratitude for the picture, looked surprised, and assured me she knew nothing concerning it. Ultimately my gentle kinswoman Anne confessed to having painted it herself for her cousin, who kissed her dear hand with a brotherly affection.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AFTER the outburst of passion on Allie's part my lord grew more deferential in his behaviour to her. Not that Miss Marlande was reconciled to him—not in the least. Since Colonel Death had taxed the nobleman on his intrigues with the rector's niece and the inn-keeper's pretty daughter, the young lady coldly avoided him now as much as she had sought him before. When he addressed her there was a strange mixture of homage and mockery in his tones. Of course it was "Miss Marlande" now, no longer "Miss Allie." But she, although noticing his changed manner, still maintained a haughty exterior. I was sitting in the smaller drawing-room, writing to de Crespigny, who was in Egypt,

telling him of my prospects, when I heard voices in the great salon, which was divided from where I was by two thin muslin curtains. Not wishing to play eavesdropper I rose to enter the other room, but as I drew aside the curtains I stood rooted to the spot. What was it ? Nothing terrifying to any heart but a jealous one like mine. Only my lord and my cousin. Only my cousin and my lord. O, how my heart sunk again within me, for I loved her so passionately, so fondly, and Heaven forgive me, so selfishly. I have since tried to analyse the composition of the predominant feeling at my heart's core at that time, and however foolish it may appear written, it is the honest truth. I distinctly remember a revulsion, a spasmodic shake, and then a most prosaic *sickness*. I wish a sceptic who, disbelieving this assertion, would fall in love himself, and see how *he* felt if his beloved seemed rather to court than otherwise the advances of another gallant.

So Harold Steyneville stood rooted to the spot without wish or power to move, and this is the conversation he heard —

Almyra (coldly) — “ You say you have

looked for me all over the castle, my lord—and now, having found me, may I ask what you wish of me? Come here, Marky, old boy, and kiss your little mistress."

My lord—"O, how I wish I were that dog!"

Almyra (candidly)—"Perhaps it would have been better if you had—Is that all you have to say?" rising.

My lord (taken aback)—"Na—a—y, certainly not—do not be so angry about that absurd act of mine the other day, for I am indeed sorry about it. I came here to ask you to forgive me—before I go away."

Almyra (surprised and disturbed)—"Away! Are you going away, my lord—and for long?"

My lord (gently)—"Nay, not for long, or far, Miss Marlande. You are sorry for that? Ah, I can see how you regret that I am not going abroad."

Almyra (coldly)—"Indeed, my lord, it does not matter to me one way or the other."

My lord (with something of a sigh)—"Well, Miss Marlande, I have come to say

good-bye; will you give me your hand and say 'I forgive you ?'"

Almyra (passionately)—"I tell you, my lord, you are always mocking at me, even now—and as I am not a child, I will tell you plainly that I do not believe you wish forgiveness or pardon, but that"—

My lord (with a laugh)—"Believe what you will, miss. Thoughts are free, but I assure you" (more serious) "I should like to hear you say 'Good-bye, I forgive you.'"

Almyra (curtseying, biting her lips and turning very white)—"Good-bye, my lord, and if it makes your conscience any easier, I tell you I forgive you."

My lord—"And won't you even give me your hand on it? You tell me that you pardon me; now it is you who are mocking. You will not even give your hand to me who has known you from a little, little child; who has seen you grow, and who has nursed you in his arms. Yes, I remember years ago, when Steyneville's father died, that the night of his death, your nurse could not find you anywhere. At last I volunteered to look for you—"

Almyra (with earnest eyes and bated breath)—“And you found me—where? I do not remember it.”

My lord—“No, because you had fallen asleep by your good protector’s side, and did not see me standing looking on the dead and living, the old man and the fair child sleeping their different slumbers together. I took you in my arms, and kissed your face, for your eyelashes were wet with tears. I felt, I must own, for the first time moved in my life. Your head was pillow'd against my shoulder as I carried you downstairs and consigned you safely to the custody of your old nurse. For that, for old times’ sake, and for finding you I deserve your kindness now. Do you not think so, Miss Marlande?”

Almyra (passionately)—“O, why did you not let me stay by my dear uncle’s side? I was better there, I was better there, and better there still had I died with him!”

Almyra Marlande, through the lapse of years I think it would have been better so too.

“My lord (gently)—“Is this the beautiful, the brilliant Miss Marlande, to wish

herself dead, in the bloom of her youth and beauty ? Are you unhappy then ? ”

Almyra (wiping away a tear)—“ No, no ; everyone is very, very kind to me ; kinder than I deserve, I know ; so pray do not let anyone know that I—that I said anything to that effect.”

My lord (looking at her fixedly) — “ It shall be a secret between *you* and *myself* alone.”

Almyra (returning the look, though blushing somewhat)—“ Yes, a secret known only to three.”

My lord—“ Humph ! *Three* ! I only know two. Are you going to tell a third ? ”

Almyra (wonderingly)—“ O, no, but Marky’s here—and he has heard too.”

My lord (as if much relieved)—“ O, I understand.”

Almyra (breaking a pause)—“ Are you not coming with us ? I mean with my aunt, Lady Mary Wortley and myself to Court ? I thought you were ? ”

My lord—“ So I intended, but being compelled to stay some few days in town to arrange some matters for Hal, concerning

his appointment, I shall be unavoidably detained."

Almyra (disappointedly)—“And cannot you come at all?”

My lord (slyly)—“I certainly do not wish to accuse a certain fair lady of vanity, but, *entre nous*, I myself feel terribly at not being able to see the same lady in her *robe de cour*.”

Almyra (laughingly and with admirable frankness)—“I see you have found me out. Yes, I did want everyone to see me who could, and—”

My lord (taking her hand)—“One moment, Miss Marlande; do you not think I deserve some indemnity for not being gratified with a look at the most—”

Almyra (composedly)—“I know what's coming now—the most ‘beautiful,’ or ‘lovely,’ or ‘gracious,’ or some such word. Please spare me, for those are such stale and hackneyed phrases.”

My lord (smiling)—“Then it is simply because beauty is hackneyed and stale herself.”

Almyra—“The premises of your logic, my lord, are wrong.”

My lord (gallantly)—“ If Ulysses had had such a mentor, I verily believe he would never have gone in search of a father, Miss Marlande.”

Almyra—“ A pity he didn’t, say I. In that case Mr. Pope wouldn’t have translated, or inflicted a translation of the original Ulysses on the public.”

My lord—“ And Homer would never have written about him.”

Almyra—“ Which would have been better still.”

A pause.

My lord (holding out his hand)—“ I am pardoned then ? ”

Pardoned ! for such a trifling thing—with his darkly handsome face wrought into an expression of half entreaty and command—I wonder who could have resisted him—no woman, alas !—and not even Almyra, who then gave him her hand, on which he imprinted a light kiss. So much for the quarrel. Two minutes after Colonel Death appeared, bearing the tidings that the valises were packed, and the coach ready for starting. Half an hour after the foregoing the

two departed. Almyra stuck a flower in each of the gentlemen's coats before they left, and as Colonel Death turned his back, my lord, thinking none were looking on, softly kissed the wavy hair on the girl's head as she leaned over his button-hole. I saw the salute, and I marked the flush that spread over miss's face after it; but this time it was not a blush of resentment, unhappily for my poor love.

END OF VOL. I.



